YELLOW STAR



Elaine Goodale Eastman



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YELLOW STAR



"I seem to be just in time, again, Stella," was all he said.
FRONTISPIECE. *See page 265.*

YELLOW STAR

A STORY OF EAST AND WEST

BY

ELAINE GOODALE EASTMAN

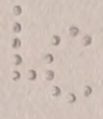
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TO WINONA.

(MOUNT HOLYOKE, 1914.)

Dark eyes, that drew their mingled fires
From native kings, and Pilgrim sires,
And fused within one glowing breast
The ardors of the East and West, —

Child of the prairie's generous sweep,
Your tryst with grave Minerva keep,
Yet first on Wisdom's roll you'll find
The sacred love of humankind !

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YELLOW STAR

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CHAPTER I

LAUREL FOLKS

IT was four o'clock of a hot September afternoon, and the buzz of twenty girls released from school filled the close room with a sibilant overflow, much like the gossip of bees in a blossoming elder-bush. The boys had already gone clattering down the stairs to the ball-field, and the little maids of the highest grammar grade demurely prepared to follow, sipping the sweets of freedom with more of leisurely enjoyment, in true feminine fashion.

A long, thin girl of thirteen or so, in a starched blue gingham frock nearly to

her sharp knees, who looked somehow as if blown straight forward by a strong wind, and a plump bud of a fair-haired damsel in pink, stood close together in an eddy of the murmuring stream.

"I don't think it's fair, Doris; no, I don't!" were the long girl's first words, earnestly spoken, as she tossed the lank locks back from her eager face with a characteristic gesture.

"Don't think what's fair?" queried Doris, serenely. "Oh, Sin, you've dropped your glasses!"

"Bother the glasses — you know what I mean. That wild Indian girl from the 'land of the Ojibways,' or wherever it is; they say she's coming to our school, and the girls will make her life one long misery, just because she wears a red blanket, prob'ly, and a feather or two in her straight, black hair — "

"You don't know what you're talking

about, Sin Parker. She never wore a blanket in her life, so there!"

"Why — why — isn't she a sure-'nough Indian, then, after all?" stammered romance-loving Cynthia, dropping the glasses again in her excitement. "And how do *you* happen to know so much about it, Doris Brown?"

"Well, I do know; mother was out calling yesterday afternoon, and she's heard all about it. I expect she's over at the Spellman house now. You see, it's this way. . . ." And the two girls, with arms about each other's waists and absorbed faces, drifted through the big doors in their turn and followed a chattering, fluttering throng down the wide, elm-lined village street.

In the prim parlor of an old New England homestead, watched over by the ghostly crayon portraits of departed

ancestors, the fate of the brown-skinned little stranger was equally the topic of discussion.

Mrs. Brown, a stout, motherly lady in a creaking black silk, had timed her call neatly for the second day after the arrival from the west of Miss Spellman's widowed sister, whose husband had lived for twenty years as a missionary among the Indians, and her unusual charge.

" No, I was never in favor of bringing the child to Laurel. I strongly advised Lucy to place her at once in one of the excellent Government boarding-schools for Indian children. I understand that they are everything that could be desired for a girl in her position — clean and well-managed — the common branches thoroughly taught, together with housework and sewing."

Miss Sophia spoke with her usual positiveness in that hard, clear-cut voice

of hers, raising her white, aquiline profile a trifle against the shadowy background of her ancestral "best room."

"Why, sister," pleaded gentle Mrs. Waring, almost tearfully, "I could no more have left my little girl in one of those big, bare, whitewashed barracks . . . to eat coarse food off thick stoneware in a noisy dining-room . . . to sleep with fifty other girls in a dormitory where the beds almost touch . . . she's not used to anything like that! I tell you, the child is as sensitive as you or I."

"I must beg of you, Lucy, not to mention *my* name in any such connection," interposed her sister. "It would certainly seem that a school expressly provided for just such girls as Yellow Star — or whatever her ridiculous name is — must be the proper place for her. However, you were determined to bring her home with you, and you have had

your way. It remains to be seen what will come of it. . . . Let me fill your glass, Emmeline. "

"No, thank you, Sophia," murmured good Mrs. Brown, hastily finishing her iced tea, and setting the thin, frosted goblet with its bits of shaved lemon peel on the silver tray at her hostess's elbow. Sophia certainly did have a positive gift for making folks uncomfortable. "I surely do hope," she plucked up courage to add, "that Yellow Star will do well in Laurel, and be happy with us, now that she is here."

"We call her Stella," faltered Mrs. Waring. It seemed wiser . . ." (here Miss Sophia indulged in what might in a less aristocratic dame have been plainly called a sniff) . . . "wiser not to retain anything that might tend to make her needlessly conspicuous—"

"Oh, I see! 'Stella' — that's very

pretty. I understand you are sending her to grammar school? "

"Stella will enter the eighth grade tomorrow," Mrs. Waring answered, drawing courage from the delicate sympathy conveyed in her old friend's soft, purring tones. "She is nearly fourteen, and I want her to be thoroughly prepared for the academy next year."

"Why, I'm surprised! How ever did you manage it, Lucy? That's my Doris's grade — and Doris was fourteen last month."

"I have taught Stella myself up to now," her adopted mother announced with modest pride, "and a quicker or more willing pupil I never met with anywhere. Yes, I've talked with the superintendent; he questioned her himself; and he says she could get into the academy this fall, he thinks, but advises a year in the grades to give her more confidence and lay a better foundation."

"Foundation for what — can any one tell me that?" Miss Sophia had been silent an unusually long time, for her. "I'm afraid my sister hasn't considered that to educate the child above her station in life and out of sympathy with her own people will only lead to her unhappiness in the end. If you would only take my advice, Lucy, before it's too late, and train the child for a little maid — since you will have her with you — instead of spoiling her as you do. . . ."

"Stella is my little girl, sister," interrupted the gentle Lucy, with the unexpected daring of some timid animal brought to bay. "She shall share whatever I have, and for as long as I live. Please remember that she hasn't a blood relation in the world, so far as she knows, and is perfectly free to live *anywhere*. I intend to give her a good education — just as good as she can take, or as I

would have given my own daughter, if I had one — and the rest is in God's hands — and her own!"

There was a minute's tense silence. Then Miss Sophia ostentatiously began a conversation on quite another subject with her subdued caller, who wanted nothing so much just then as to catch a glimpse of the unconscious bone of contention, but simply dared not ask in so many words to see Yellow Star.

Lucy sat back in her chair with her thin hands squeezed tightly together, trying hard to recover her composure. It was quite true that Sophia had opposed from the first her purpose to adopt and educate the child, and had yielded ungraciously enough in the end, merely because she had exhausted her weapons. There were but the two sisters left, and the homestead belonged to them equally. Mr. Waring had died the year before,

leaving only the few hundred dollars that represented a missionary's scanty savings. It was entirely natural and right that his widow should come home to live, and quite impossible for her to leave behind the waif whom she had picked up in the Indian camp some eight or nine years earlier, and had taken fully into her heart and home. Her dear husband had loved and believed in the child, just as she did. Yes, Sophia was making it very hard for her, who shrank unspeakably from anything like a contest of wills; yet the purpose with which she had come back to the old home was unshaken.

As Lucy sat there, struggling with painful thoughts and oblivious to the murmur of civil conversation, her quick eye caught a flash of white — evidently a slip of folded paper that some one had slid in the crack of the closed door. She hastily left her chair, and with her

sister's cold gray eye upon her, secured the paper and slipped out of the room with it in her hand, for it was naturally impossible to open it under that fire of suspicious and almost hostile glances. The hall was empty, and she dropped down on a haircloth covered davenport and read:

"MOTHER DEAR: I've done everything you said unpackt my things put them away ironed the napkins put on a clean frock for tea and set the table. I just *have* to go out in the orchard and think awhile. I wanted dreadfully to pick some flowers but Aunt said not to and I'm not going to. If you want me for anything you can find me in Apple-Tree Row next the Fence. I call it my House. Your Little Girl."

This writing of unnecessary notes was a harmless fancy of Yellow Star's, that

her foster-mother had not had the heart to correct. She had had so few playmates on the reservation — for she wasn't allowed to play with the camp children, and it had happened that but one of the agency people had a little girl of suitable age and irreproachable propriety — that she had been really obliged to invent most of her own amusements. And then, too, Lucy had told herself that "the child couldn't have too much practice in English."

But the "silly trick," as Miss Sophia called it, had already been a source of some disquiet in the ill-assorted little household of three. Perhaps she had better give the child a hint. And Sophia had contemptuously repudiated the title of "Aunt," so naturally bestowed on the only sister of the only mother that little Yellow Star had ever known. "None of that nonsense for

me," she had declared. "*I* haven't adopted the child!"

"I suppose I'll have to tell her not to say it any more . . . and she'll think it so strange," mused poor Lucy ruefully enough, foreseeing many trials for her darling, as she gathered up her nice black skirt and made her way as daintily as a cat along the box-bordered walk, past the grape arbor and the tidy kitchen garden into the grassy old apple orchard. She seldom went out-of-doors, except for church, or calling, or shopping, or on some entirely rational errand. It was perhaps the only trait of Stella's that she vaguely disapproved — this craze to be off and into all sorts of outlandish places. Where under the canopy was she now? There was the last row of trees bending with red and yellow fruit, at the further end of the orchard, and no sign of her.

Everything was warm and sweet and very still. Only the invisible choir of crickets made silence musical, and a flaming torch of goldenrod beside the crumbling old stone wall seemed ready to light the summer's funeral pyre. Not that Lucy Waring thought of it in just that way, but possibly Stella's dreams and fancies might have been so translated.

Perhaps it had not been quite polite to leave the house so abruptly before their guest had taken her leave. She had forgotten . . . ought she to go back at once? But where could the child be? she wondered. As she stood hesitating, a low, sweet call made her look quickly up, and next instant a girlish figure swung down out of the old apple-tree and dropped lightly upon its feet.

Hair of a dense blue-black was neatly braided and tied up with red ribbon that



A girlish figure swung down out of the old apple-tree and dropped lightly upon its feet. *Page 16.*

matched the red plaid in her irreproachable gingham frock; a faint sort of underglow warmed the smooth, brown skin; a something spirited about the carriage of the well-shaped head and a singular directness in the glance of the soft, black eyes were the first things you noticed. Surely, this was no ordinary child.

"Oh, mother, mother!" she cried, impulsively throwing her arms around the little lady's neck. "Isn't it beautiful? Oh, I wish we had real grass and apple-trees in Dakota, don't you? It wasn't wrong to come out here, was it? Don't say it was wrong, mother! Can't this be my House to come out to when Miss Sophia doesn't want me? I feel as if she didn't want me; her house seems to push me right out somehow. And I'm terribly afraid of going to school; I've been thinking how perhaps the other girls won't want me either."

"You must be brave, darling," quavered poor Mrs. Waring. "Remember, this strangeness will all wear off very soon."

"Oh, I shall be *brave*," burst out Yellow Star, letting her slender arms fall at her sides, and holding her jet-crowned head higher than ever. "My people have always been brave, you know — so of course I have to be! And nobody at all will ever know how afraid I am . . . nobody but you, mother.

"That yellow-haired girl in the pink dress that just went up the straight path to the front door . . . there she comes down again with the stout lady with shiny black beads all over her bonnet and her tight, black waist — she looks just like some kind of large, shining beetle, doesn't she? — well, my heart beats so it shakes me all over when I even *think* of going up and speaking to that

girl in pink! I think she's perfectly beautiful — and I'm terribly afraid of her — but *she'll* never guess how I feel. There's one thing I have to tell you, though," she added in a more subdued voice. "I find I can't call Miss Sophia 'Aunt' any more. Do you think you'll mind very much, mother? I'm almost certain she can't be any real relation."

CHAPTER II

THE GIRL FROM DAKOTA

LUCY WARING had no warriors' blood that she knew of to fall back upon, so perhaps it was partly her long association with the stoics of the plains that made it possible for her to turn over her little girl to the "new teacher," the very next day, with the stiff smile of her New England forebears under social duress — to drag her eyes away from the wild, despairing courage of Yellow Star's great black ones — to walk quite steadily out of the door and down the long flight of wooden steps and along the drowsy village street, without even a backward look to share or soften the imaginary terrors of School.

These took no worse form, just at first,

than the curious but not unfriendly stares of forty-two pairs of critical young eyes, and the penetrating susurrus of forty-two edged voices, all of which the Indian girl felt with a pricking and tingling anguish in every fiber of her sensitive body, as she sat rigid in a front seat, directly facing the teacher's desk.

Then the second bell rang, and there was a hush. As soon as she could, after opening exercises, Miss Morrison supplied the new pupil with pen and ink and the usual blank for the school record. It looked something like this:

Your name in full.
Date of birth. Year, month and day.
Name of father.
Father's occupation.
School previously attended.
What grade were you in?

A wild glance down the length of the paper made it certain that her worst fears had been promptly realized, and poor Stella, after setting down her new name, Stella Waring, sat staring at the other five questions, fairly tense with nervous dread, until her busy teacher had found time to note the situation. Then she bent over the girl from Dakota and asked very kindly, in a low voice:

"Why don't you put down your age and your father's name, Stella?"

"I do not know my date of birth, year, month and day; I do not know my father's name and occupation, and I never went to school before," she replied in tones sharpened by fright, so that they rang through the crowded schoolroom, causing an audible gasp of astonishment.

"Why, I was certainly told that you belonged here," wondered Miss Morrison;

then, with ready tact divining something of the girl's embarrassment:

"Never mind about the questions just now. This is our lesson for to-day; look it over, please, and be prepared to stand and read when I call upon you."

This Stella could do, and knew she could. Abundant time was given to recover herself; then the paragraph assigned was read, if somewhat slowly and with the faintest trace of foreign accent, yet distinctly, and with more delicacy of modulation than perhaps any other in that room could command.

"Very good, indeed," approved Miss Morrison; and this time the slight buzz sounded almost like encouragement, and the pricking and tingling were less agonizing than before.

When the others passed out at recess, Stella remained in her seat at a sign from the teacher, who sat down beside her and

bent her violet-scented brown head sympathetically toward her singular but far from unattractive new pupil.

"About the age, dear," she began, tentatively, "surely you must know. . . ."

"I am supposed to be thirteen years old, Miss Morrison, but I have not any birthday. Mother — I mean Mrs. Waring — always makes me a birthday cake on the nineteenth of February, because she says it is so sort of lonesome not to have a birthday. But I do not know *really*, so of course I could not put it down on the paper. You see, I . . . I was *found!* I never heard my father's name or my mother's name either — nobody knows who they were."

Here the clear voice got somehow muffled, and the warm-hearted teacher hastily assured her that it didn't matter one bit about the questions — she had had no idea — and impulsively

she took the hated paper out of the little girl's sensitive brown hand.

It might have been as well if Lucy Waring had explained matters somewhat before her abrupt departure; but the truth was that she had strung her difficult courage to the necessary point of leaving the child to her own resources in this strange, and possibly unfriendly, new environment. The effort had carried her to a really unnecessary extreme; she had forgotten that Yellow Star's personal history was as yet quite unknown in Laurel.

Miss Morrison felt the incident to be a touching one. She even reproached herself for thoughtless adherence to routine, and during the rest of the morning gave a quite unusual degree of attention to her new charge. It appeared that Stella had the correct eye and delicate hand of her race; she was an excellent penman;

she had been well drilled in the essentials. More: she was eager, alert, intense — quick to spring upon an idea as a cat upon its prey.

Most of the children went home at noon, and no sooner was school dismissed than Cynthia Parker, whose near-sighted brown eyes had been turned anxiously, half maternally toward the stranger, at the cost of frequent, though not unusual, blunders in her own recitations, darted to her side and began to speak rapidly.

"I know who you are; Doris Brown told me; she's that yellow-haired girl in pink — see! she's looking this way. My name's Cynthia Parker and I hope we'll be friends — I read everything I can get hold of about Indians — mother says I'm just like one. Do you like dogs?" And almost before Stella could find breath to reply, in her pretty,

precise English, that she did, Sin had taken up the tale.

"I've got two — that's the big one waiting for me outside — his name's Sir Walter Scott, but we call him Scotty for short. Here, Scotty, old fellow!" And as the gaunt hound rushed upon them both, nearly knocking them down in his eagerness, she threw her arms around his homely neck and hugged him with an unaffected ardor that quite warmed the new girl's heart.

"Let's walk slowly and get behind; can we?" she whispered, shyly. "They do look at us so!" In fact, there was unwonted lingering that day, and much open whispering, which the three pretended to ignore. Doris had waited, as usual, and joined them at the door.

"Of course we can; nobody has dinner till half past twelve, and it's only five minutes' walk to your house," she as-

sented, pleasantly, while Cynthia bluntly remarked:

"They're awfully disappointed, you know, because you didn't wear your Indian suit to-day — a blanket and feathers in your hair. Why, you look almost exactly like anybody else, in that nice, brown linen."

"Indian girls don't wear feathers; only the men do that," smiled the new girl, who much preferred to "look like anybody else," and found personalities a bit embarrassing. Still, she was feeling a good deal better in the company of her new-found friends.

"Then do they all wear pretty blouses and stylish hats?" Sin unblushingly inquired.

"Well, there aren't many of the old-style dresses left among the Sioux — my people. Why, a blanket robe trimmed with real elks' teeth, or one of beaded

doeskin, is worth a hundred dollars! Besides, nearly all the girls go to school nowadays, and wear dresses and hats like mine, — only not quite so pretty, perhaps, because my dear mother made these and she has such good taste." ended Stella, loyally and lovingly.

"Mrs. Waring is perfectly lovely, I think," began Doris, tactfully, but suddenly broke off with a little cry of dismay.

"Oh, Sin! whose dog is that? Hadn't you better get the chain on Scotty?"

Alas, the warning came too late! The strange dog had already offered some nameless canine impertinence to Sir Walter, whose temper was none of the most patient. Instantly he hurled himself upon the new-comer, and the fight was on.

The three girls had purposely loitered, and the quiet street was almost deserted. It was the universal dinner hour, and boys and girls were rapidly disappearing

down various side streets, urged homewards by the double spur of sharp young appetites and savory odors of "mother's cooking."

"Help! help!" screamed Sin, and forthwith flung herself with more valor than discretion upon the wallowing mass in the middle of the dusty road.

Doris grew very white, as she set her back to the hedge, drew her spotless skirts tightly around her, and earnestly begged her friend to "be careful!" But heedless, brave, loving Sin, crying loudly now and terribly alarmed for Scotty's safety, persisted in wild and none too prudent attempts to drag him bodily forth from the fray. The strange dog had fastened viciously upon his throat, and the fight began to look serious. Why *didn't* some one come?

In that very minute some one did, and the "some one" was no other than

the girl from Dakota. She had broken a stout switch from an apple-tree that overhung the sidewalk near at hand, and was belaboring the strange dog in a steady, business-like fashion, at the same time calling him off in ringing tones, and in a language that he evidently understood, if her astonished classmates did not.

"Kigelá! kigelá!" they thought they heard her say, over and over; and whether the strange words composed a sort of charm or secret incantation for dogs, or whether it was some compelling power in the personality of the black-haired girl, or merely the flail-like regularity of her vigorous blows, it is certain at any rate that he soon let go his hold, and ran yelping away.

Sir Walter, gallantly scrambling to his long legs and shaking his bleeding but still warlike head, would gladly have

followed, but was forcibly restrained by his disheveled mistress, who had contrived at last to snap the chain upon his collar, and while breathlessly dragging him homewards, did not forget to call back over her shoulder in broken phrases her admiring gratitude to Yellow Star.

CHAPTER III

A LESSON IN HISTORY

THE square north parlor of the century-old Spellman homestead was furnished with few concessions to modern taste. In summer it was carefully darkened, and during the colder months exhaled that penetrating chill that is still more or less characteristic of the traditional "best room" in rural New England. There was also a mingled odor of sanctity and dried rose-leaves that filled the soul of the young exile with a secret awe. She understood perfectly that children were not expected to enter that room uninvited; even the family reserved it for occasions of ceremony; and it was with a thrill of conscious guilt

overborne by an irresistible attraction, that she had stolen in alone on this keen October morning before Miss Sophia was up, and while her sister was capably engaged in preparing breakfast in the large, cheery kitchen.

It was not the ornaments, wonderful as they were, upon the high mantel-piece — the pallid wax flowers under glass, the waving pampas plumes and pink-lined tropic shells dear to romance — no, not even the mysterious closed piano — it was those ghostly crayon portraits in their tarnished gilt frames that drew this little unrelated fragment of humanity with a fascination that she did not in the least understand. She only knew that to gaze upon their white, shrouded faces was to yearn for even the staring, pictured counterparts, even the chill, clustered gravestones of her own vanished forebears. Vanished, indeed, since not

even a name or a memory remained to their wistful and solitary descendant!

And these Spellmans and Russells — these revered ancestors of her dear "Mother" Waring as of the thorny and unapproachable Miss Sophia — their bygone greatness had been so impressed upon her by allusion and suggestion that in the secret world of her imagination it reached heroic proportions. So this child of two races, the one by birth, the other by associations quite as real and vital, well-nigh forgot the shadowy demi-gods of her people while she bowed at the shrine of the commonplace county Judge who was the greatest of all the Russells, and fancied a beauty as of the moon and stars in the conventional portraits of his wife and daughters, with their uncovered necks and pallid, simpering faces.

Only a few stolen moments of gazing, and Stella crossed the dark hall on noise-

less feet — for even in the black-leather boxes of civilization she had contrived to keep her native lightness of step — and softly opened the dining-room door.

With its cheerful morning sunshine streaming over the chromoed walls and gayly-carpeted floor, and with the canary singing his prettiest in the south window, above the row of thrifty geraniums and begonias, this room was the strongest possible contrast to the gloomy one she had just left behind. Ah! and that very minute the wonderful bird came out of the clock on the mantel-piece and seven times called "Cuckoo!" while, as if in answer to the call, the door into the kitchen opened, letting in the heartsome odor of frying ham and eggs, and Mother Waring with the smoking coffee-pot.

Stella flew to bring the dish of oatmeal and the hot plates, and then busied herself with the neat tray that was regularly

carried up to Miss Sophia's chamber with her morning coffee and toast. To be sure, the elder sister was only five years older than Lucy, who owned to fifty-two, and who, folks said, had always been "kinder pindlin'," and in truth was now much worn with hard work and recent grief. But we know that there are always people who contrive to be waited upon, and others to whom it naturally falls to do the waiting.

Housewifely traditions were closely adhered to in Laurel, where but few even of the "first families" kept a maid, and it was now Stella's duty, together with dishwashing and dusting and such of the lighter household tasks as Lucy would allow her to undertake, to carry up Miss Sophia's tray. Even that lady had grudgingly conceded that "the child wasn't as clumsy and heavy-footed as you might expect," though why you

shouldn't expect anything of the sort it would have taken a better ethnologist than Miss Sophia to explain.

The little ceremony ended, and the hard old eyes met with a low-voiced "Good morning," and a rather frightened smile, the two ate their own substantial breakfast with a hearty appetite, and directly afterward "flew 'round" to get dishes and other "chores" out of the way before school-time. At a quarter to nine, Stella put on her neat jacket and knitted red tam-o'-shanter, hugged her kind foster-mother, and set out with cheerfulness upon her morning pilgrimage, glancing about shyly at the first corner for a possible glimpse of demure Doris tripping along the sidewalk, or scatter-brained Cynthia flying breathlessly down the hill.

Laurel, like many another village of its ilk, was an odd mixture of modern demo-

cratic conditions with the elder social inheritance. In the village school, the children of European peasants, the earlier and quick-witted Irish, the later Poles, with their broad, heavy faces, two or three brilliant, undersized young Jews, and the dark-brown scions of several long-established negro families, sat side by side with the severely self-respecting descendants of the earliest Puritan stock. The six and seven-year-olds knew no difference, and flocked indiscriminately together at recess, but it must be admitted that the caste idea grew with their growth, and that in grammar-school and academy circles the lines were drawn more definitely than in many larger places, to the end of needless resentments and heartaches.

Yellow Star added one more ingredient to the racial melting-pot. But whether because of a certain aboriginal dignity,

or the name and protection of a family as much respected as any in Laurel, at any rate nearly everybody found it possible to accept her with excellent grace, and it might have been something personal to herself that bid fair to complete her conquest of the village. Two of the very "nicest" girls in Laurel, Cynthia, whose father was supposed to be the "best-fixed" merchant in town, and Doris, the busy Doctor's only child, were already her devoted friends.

Notwithstanding the fact that she had promptly taken her place among the best scholars in the room, the girl from Dakota had not yet lost her sense of audacity in rising to recite before so imposing a company.

"Why, Stella! you don't have to dig at your books the way you do; it's absurd! Look at me; I haven't opened a single one since Friday afternoon, and

I get along," argued happy-go-lucky Sin.

"But you belong here, and you have been to school always. It is different with me. This is my one chance of really *belonging*." And, contrary to all advice and precedent, Stella persisted in regarding school as a privilege to be lived up to, and failure in recitation as deep disgrace.

The first thing after recess was American History review.

"How did the early settlers treat the Indians? Mary Maloney," began Miss Morrison.

"They treated them fine," declared the auburn-haired Mary, with a sly glance over her shoulder at the unreasonably popular new arrival.

"What did the Indians do? Rosey Bernstein."

"The cruel and treacherous savages

turned upon the defenseless settlers with fire an' ax," Rosey glibly recited. "They now began a series of frightful massacres."

"They stove the babies' heads in, right in front of their mothers' faces, and then made the mothers walk hundreds of miles barefoot in the deep snow," eagerly amended woolly-headed Pete Holley, and all the boys wagged their heads and grinned with satisfaction.

"After they had scalped all the fathers by the light o' their burnin' buildings," finished Rosey complacently.

Several hands went up, but Yellow Star in her excitement quite forgot to wait for the teacher's permission.

"Who says that the settlers were kind to the Indians?" rang out in challenging tones.

More hands madly clawed the air, and Miss Morrison rather unwillingly nodded to Rosey, who read from her open book:

"'They treated the Indians for the most part with justice and kindness, notwithstanding which the cruel —'"

"That will do for the present, Rosey," interrupted her teacher, and was hastily casting about in her own mind for a basis of compromise between warring factions when a certain black-eyed little heroine rose precipitately to her feet, and delivered her soul without fear or favor.

"Was it treating them with justice and kindness to take their lands away from them, and give them only a few beads and knives for thousands of acres? Was it fair to give them whiskey to drink, and knives to kill people with, and then when they were drunk and angry and killed some bad white men, to punish the whole tribe by burning their villages and wives and children?" demanded her people's advocate.

" Did the ' cruel, treacherous savages ' take away all the white people's guns and then shoot them down, women with little babies and boys and girls smaller than us? Did they chase them all over the prairie and kill them while they begged for mercy, and then call it a *battle?* That's what your soldiers did to us, and *I was in it!* Maybe, if we wrote the history books, there wouldn't be so much in them about the ' treacherous Indians! ' "

Breathless and darkly flushed, the girl from Dakota sank into her seat, and there was an awful hush.

Cynthia was staring at her friend with open-mouthed admiration, and tender-hearted Doris had her face hidden on her desk, while most of the children, horror-struck, yet thoroughly enjoying the situation, looked hopefully to " Teacher " for summary vengeance on the daring rebel against constituted authority.

That personage, however, gazed straight before her with expressionless face, until the silence had grown positively fearsome in its explosive quality. Then she simply remarked:

"Close your books, children! Our lesson in history is over for to-day."

"APPLE-TREE HOUSE, MONDAY.

"DEAR MOTHER-OF-MINE, I love Miss Morrison she never said a word though I was bad to-day and talked right out in school. The book was wrong and I was right but that didn't make it proper for me to talk did it? But Miss Morrison is a Angel and Doris Brown cried because she was sorry for the poor Indians. I love her too. How many kind people there are in the world! I am so happy I almost feel as if I could love Miss Sophia but not quite. Your Little Girl."

CHAPTER IV

THE - ONE - WHO - WAS - LEFT - ALIVE

THE traditional Thanksgiving dinner was a ceremony never omitted at the Spellman homestead, even though there had been years when Miss Sophia had eaten it quite alone, with a determination rather grim than grateful. This year, there were the two elderly sisters, alone in their generation, yet with little in common save their family history and childhood memories, and the little maid from sun-steeped plains of far-off Dakota who sat sedately between them, plying her knife and fork with a decorum that even Miss Sophia could not gainsay. Now and again her black eyes darted keenly from one subdued face to the other, as if in search of something; a

" trick," Miss Sophia said, that made her " as nervous as a witch! "

The long, heavy, and, to tell the truth, rather silent and oppressive meal had come to an end at last, with pumpkin pie and Indian pudding made punctiliously after the old family recipes, and a mold of " quaking jelly," that had been a favorite of Lucy's from childhood. After the black coffee was brought in, Stella slid her nuts and raisins into her pocket, and rose at a nod from her foster-mother.

" Mrs. Maloney will wash the dishes to-day, dear," she said. " You may go out now, or do anything you like for the rest of the day. And I think I hear Cynthia's whistle," she added, indulgently.

Miss Sophia sighed aggressively. That clear, boyish whistle was a fresh offense in her ears.

" Go out by the side door, Stella; and,

whatever you do, don't let in that dog with his great, muddy feet!" she commanded; sure that, if Cynthia were coming, Scotty could not be far off.

"Come on down to Doris' house," burst out Sin, before the door was fairly open. "It's always lots of fun down there; her mother lets us crack nuts and pop corn and everything. Mother has a headache again and I mustn't make any noise around home, and of course it's solemn as a church here — 't always is. Can't you come, Jibby?" she begged, anxiously.

(The new name was short for "Ojibway," invented to tease the little Sioux girl, but Yellow Star accepted it, as she did most things, with quite stoical composure.)

"Yes, I can, Sin; I can do anything I want all the rest of to-day," she answered, gravely. "But oh! do let's go to the woods!"

"All right; put on your things quick, and come along! (Down, Scotty! down, sir!) We must stop for Doris, though; and I think Miss Morrison's there to dinner to-day."

Stella's night-black eyes glowed at this, for she silently worshiped her sympathetic teacher.

Arrived at the Doctor's, they found a large and merry party gathered around the air-tight stove in the shabby parlor, listening with enthusiasm to the warbling of operatic stars on the new phonograph, followed by a "piece" on the piano by demure Doris. There were Grandpa and Grandma Brown, a brisk and well-preserved old couple, with cheeks like rosy winter apples; Uncle Si Wolcott, Mrs. Brown's eccentric bachelor brother, who lived all alone in a white farmhouse on the "Bay road," Doris and her father and mother, and, finally, two guests

who were not "kin" to any one else present.

One was Miss Morrison, whose home was in an up-to-date little city in a neighboring State, and who must otherwise have eaten her Thanksgiving dinner rather forlornly in a boarding-house; the other, a lanky boy of sixteen or so, who wore glasses and a thoughtful air, had created some amusement for the giggling girls at the academy by his name, which was Honey. When thus appealed to in the velvet tones of some "lady teacher," the girls seemed to think it funny. His "front name" was Ethan, and he was an orphan with his own way to make, his nearest relative a none too loving "aunt by marriage," which explains his appearance on the day of family reunions at Mother Brown's hospitable table.

The present was not, as Grandpa Brown had more than once remarked

with apparently a distinct sense of personal injury, a " genoowine old-fashioned Thanksgivin'." Far from affording the excellent sleighing which had been expected to facilitate family gatherings in Grandpa's day, and the coasting that had undoubtedly sharpened the youngsters' appetites for " turkey an' fixin's," an unseasonable Indian summer warmth pervaded this particular twenty-seventh of November. When the young people set out on their walk, Ethan Honey and Miss Morrison being included, they found the country roads soft underfoot, rusty green leaves yet clinging to the wide-spreading apple boughs, with here and there a frost-bitten apple, and even the yellow of ripe corn still nestling in some of the brown stooks that dotted the fields like tattered and smoke-stained wigwams. Red alder berries and gray clematis fringes and the " ghosts of the golden-

rod " adorned the wayside, while the purple-brown woodlands melted into a nameless haze upon the lonely horizon line.

" I'm fond of cross-country hikes, aren't you? " Ethan observed, as he turned to offer Stella an informal lift over the low stone wall that lay between them and a short cut to " Wolcott's Woods."

" I do not know that word ' hikes,' " she answered, in her slow, careful English, " but if it is anything like to-day, I am sure I shall like it very much. I never really knew about Thanksgiving before."

" Oh, didn't you? " asked the boy, trying not to stare at his self-possessed little companion, whose cadenced voice and quaint ways, as well as her unusual appearance, might have given him some excuse. " I suppose of course your people don't keep Thanksgiving," he added, awkwardly.

"Father and Mother Waring always had the good dinner and the church service," Stella answered, "but somehow I never understood about the family part. I suppose because I was only a little girl then; or else because they don't have families out in Dakota! I mean, there are so many lonely ones whose families are back east, with the old houses and the old names and all the old things," the girl persisted, greatly to Ethan's secret amusement at her unexpected point of view.

"But, Stella — that *is* your name, isn't it?" he began.

"It is one of my names," she replied with dignity. But just then Scotty dashed between them, nearly upsetting both, while Sin followed with scarcely less of abandon, shrieking "A woodchuck! A woodchuck!" at the top of her voice.

"I wouldn't go any nearer if I were you, Cynthia," advised Ethan gravely, while Doris and her teacher, calling out futile appeals to "be careful," lagged breathless in the rear.

"It's nothing but a horrid old skunk," Cynthia presently complained, coming back quite crestfallen. "Will you never learn anything, you old dunderhead?" This to the sheepish Sir Walter, whom she had by his collar and the hair of his head.

"When you've skinned as many as I have, you won't be liable to make any mistake," the boy observed; whereat Doris shuddered visibly.

"You know," she informed the others, "Ethan skins everything he can get hold of — and cuts them up, too, as often as not — cats and dogs and rabbits and frogs — ugh! He calls it 'studying biology,' — isn't it perfectly dreadful?"

" Ethan will probably be a great scientist, some day," suggested Miss Morrison.

" He's going to be a doctor, he says," Cynthia bluntly objected, causing the boy to blush uncomfortably, while Stella regarded him with new respect.

To change the subject, he said something about prairie-dogs, and the girl from Dakota was called upon for an offhand description of these interesting animals, which she gave soberly enough, though making the others laugh with her quaint characterizations and clever mimicry.

Having crossed several fields and followed a farm lane to its end, Ethan let down a " pair o' bars," and the company climbed a rocky pasture knoll, where Yellow Star's quick eye caught something gleaming like dull fire among the dead brown of the bare bushes.

" What is that? It is like a sunset! "

she exclaimed, and Cynthia echoed her.

"Oh, what is it? Oh, how beautiful!"

"Bitter-sweet, and the finest I ever saw!" declared Miss Morrison, with enthusiasm. "Oh, oh! was there ever such a mass of it before? Have you a knife about you, Ethan? I simply must have some for my schoolroom; it will make a dream of a decoration, and last all winter."

Cynthia and Doris ran about and exclaimed and unwound the most splendid branches, but the Indian girl stood quite still and let the beauty of it all sink deep into her heart. Years later, the sight of a red-gold spray, or even the very name of "bitter-sweet," brought up that riot of color on the rocky knoll, and the wordless sadness of those veiled and lonely hills.

"Now, girls, we simply must get on,

or it will be dark before we can walk to Wolcott's Woods and back again," declared Ethan resolutely, shutting his knife with a snap. The whole party followed his lead past a fringe of hemlock, maple, hornbeam and white birch, on to a wild and deep glen that suddenly opened at their very feet, with a foaming brook in its heart. Scrambling down the steep sides of the miniature canyon, they followed the stream to its outlet in a tiny pond, which is flanked on one side by the finest grove of pine in Laurel township.

"This is Uncle Si's ice-pond," announced Doris, proudly, "and *these* are Wolcott's Woods!"

It was so mild that Ethan insisted upon taking off his coat, cushioning a giant log where the girls might sit and rest after their three-mile tramp, while the sun already glowed red through the

autumn haze, near to the western horizon.

"Aren't you glad we came, Jibby?" urged Sin, ecstatically.

"Jibby . . . another of those names of yours, I suppose," teased Ethan, gently.

"No, not my name at all," she told him, holding her head the least bit higher. "My school name is Stella, because it is the Latin for Star. I was called Yellow Star before that, because it is the English of my own name."

"And that is?"

"I do think you could not pronounce it, but I will say it very slowly. Wee-chah'-pee-zee'-wee — like that. No, the second syllable is rough — in the throat — so!"

"Aspirate," suggested Miss Morrison; and each in turn tried to pronounce the queer name, with varying success.

"I chose that name for myself when I was four years old," Stella went on, quite seriously. "I was looking up through the teepee door at the bright yellow stars overhead. I did not like the name the old women gave me; it is a sad name; Ish-na'-nee-un'-lah — The-One-Who-was-left-Alive!"

Everybody was listening eagerly, for the brave little exile seldom spoke of herself unless in answer to a direct question, and a curious sort of dignity that she had about her forbade too close questioning. Now it seemed that the unspoken comradeship of the hour had unloosed her tongue, and something, too, of the softness and quiet pathos of the late November afternoon had crept into her expressive voice.

She raised her eyes to the four sympathetic faces that were gazing straight into her own, and the color

rose under her clear, dark skin as she asked:

"Shall I tell you how they came to give me that sad name?"

"Oh, do!" "Tell us, tell us!" chorused the girls; but Ethan sat a little apart, and seemed absorbed in whittling a stick that he had picked up under the great pine.

"You have all heard of the fight at Wounded Knee?" began Yellow Star. "Perhaps you know how they fought — troops in uniform with big guns, against women and children and men whose guns had been taken from them?" (They nodded gravely.) "Well, it was three days after the fight that a party went out from the agency, eighteen miles away, to bury the dead Indians. The agency doctor went with them, and it was he who found wrapped in blankets, in her dead mother's arms, and lying partly covered with snow — for there had been

a snow-storm on the day before — a little baby, alive and crying.

"They threw the mother's body into the great pit with more than a hundred others; but a kind woman of the camp took the baby home and fed and took care of it. That baby was me!

"That is why I do not know who my father and mother were, or whether I have a single relation in this world. There is no way to find out, for nearly all my father's band were killed by the soldiers on that day, and there were many babies who died, and no one knows who I am. And that is why the old women called me The-One-Who-was-left-Alive!"

That was all. A very simple little story, very quietly told; but somehow no one who heard it had much to say. With one accord they all got up from the mossy log and set out for home. Pres-

ently they began to talk again about other things, and even to laugh as lightly as before. Just as they parted, Ethan slipped into Yellow Star's hand the thing he had shaped with his knife from a splinter of pine while she told her story. It was a little, five-pointed star.

CHAPTER V

IN WOLCOTT'S WOODS

"FOR the land sakes!" exclaimed Grandma Brown, knitting faster and faster, as was her wont when disturbed in mind. "Why don't that Parker girl's mother let her dresses down, I want to know? 'Pears to me her legs get longer an' longer every day! I see her tearin' down the hill a spell ago, with that outlandish dog o' hers in full chase, and all I could think of was a hen-turkey with its wings spread out, tryin' to get away from a fox."

"Why, mother! Cynthia is only a little girl," observed Doris' mother, in quiet amusement.

"Same age as our Doris, ain't she? When I was young, gals was women at

fourteen, an' expected to quit playin' with the boys, wear their dresses to their shoe-tops an' be pretty-behaved."

"I wish mother'd let me wear *my* dresses to the tops of my shoes," put in Doris, demurely. "I'm three months older than Cynthia, anyway." She had opened the sitting-room door just in time to hear the last speech, but was careful not to commit herself to the rest of her grandma's program.

"You all going out to your uncle's place again to-day, Doris?" asked her mother, indulgently. "I see Cynthia's here, but where are the others?"

"Oh, Stella had her Saturday work to do, and couldn't get 'round before two o'clock, she said. It's most that, now," and she turned again to the window. No one was in sight except Cynthia and Scotty, who were joyously running races up and down the yard.

Here Mother Brown disappeared into the pantry, possibly to put up a bag of her fat, brown cookies, and Doris hunted in the hall closet for her white sweater, while Grandma commented shrewdly:

"That gal's more of a woman than any the rest of ye, if she *is* an Injun."

"Wolcott's Woods" had become a favorite resort since that Thanksgiving ramble which had brought the three friends closer together, and the fact that the woods belonged to Doris' Uncle Si, together with the further consideration that the "new teacher" usually went with the girls, had satisfied their respective mothers of their safety on these excursions. There was talk of snow-shoes and skis, and later of fishing-rods and flower-baskets, but just what went on in Wolcott's Woods no one knew exactly, for the "Clover-Leaf" was a secret society of three, with Ethan Honey,

Miss Morrison and Uncle Si as honorary members.

Presently Stella and her teacher appeared, and the four set out at once — or five, counting in the irrepressible Sir Walter, whose care-free bark voiced the adventurous spirit of the holiday party. It was a warm Saturday in April — one of the few days when our New England spring really opens her heart to the wayfarer, and from time to time they were overtaken by country teams whose occupants gazed curiously, even pityingly, upon them. Once a farmer returning homeward with an empty lumber wagon offered the whole party "a lift," which proposal was gracefully evaded by Miss Morrison. It always amused her to note that the "natives" evidently could not conceive of any one's walking for pleasure, or indeed walking at all, unless he were frankly too poor to ride.

"Let's go round to the house, first," whispered Doris, hanging to Miss Morrison's arm, when they were almost there. The child had a coaxing way with her that was not easy to resist; and, moreover, Uncle Si's late russet apples were not to be despised at this time of the year. So they all wandered up to the side door of the low, white farmhouse, with the square, forbidding front and homely, inviting back premises characteristic of its type.

The door into the summer kitchen stood wide open, and an inquisitive hen or two had actually crossed the threshold; yet repeated knocks brought no answer. Cynthia and Scotty had already dashed off in the direction of the barn-yard, from which there presently came sounds so suggestive of rustic revelry that the others precipitately followed.

"I told him he didn't dast to ride one

o' the cows," shrieked Sin, faint with laughter, "and he's done it! Look, oh, look! It's as good as the circus — better!"

Even Miss Morrison couldn't resist the spectacle of Ethan Honey's long legs gripping the sides of his reluctant horned steed, his face wearing a smile of mingled triumph and embarrassment as he was borne at a gallop round and round the enclosure, with Scotty yapping delightedly at his heels. In another minute or so, without slackening his speed, the young man had alighted quite informally at their feet. He rose and felt mechanically for his cap, which had disappeared, while he gravely remarked:

"Your house is quite finished. I think I saw a 'For Rent' sign in the window to-day!"

The great secret was out! The trio of friends had early felt the common

need of a tangible house o' dreams, and now the primitive shelter they craved had taken shape in Uncle Si's hospitable woods, and chiefly under Ethan's capable and willing hands.

"Let's go right over now and have our housewarming," demanded practical Doris. "Where's Uncle Si?"

"He went to the store right after dinner," Ethan answered, "and I'll have plenty of time to finish my chores after you go. I've been helping afternoons and Saturdays for quite a while. Would any of you care for a drink of fresh buttermilk? I churned this morning."

Well, there are worse things than the soothing acid of that velvet drink to wash the dust from one's throat after a three-mile tramp. It wasn't many minutes before Ethan was leading the way to the woods, his pockets sagging with apples, while Sin had stuffed her sailor

blouse, and Doris' sweater was quite knobby with the same.

There were more shrieks of rapture, naturally, when the girls spied their ingenious shack of fresh-cut evergreen boughs, which had been thrust into the ground in a circle and cleverly interlaced so as to make the hut all but water-tight. There was an opening left for a door — rather small, it is true, but still satisfactory — with another, smaller and higher up, for a window; and so neat and careful had been the young builder's craftsmanship that the ferns on the threshold were scarcely more disturbed than they might have been by the nest-building of a bird.

The party stooped one by one to the oval door, and exclaimed over the fascinations of the shadowy interior, which reminded Yellow Star vividly of the conical wigwams of her people. The little

house was quite bare and empty, and redolent of the scent of fern and pine.

"We ought to have a couch of fir-balsam," suggested Miss Morrison, who had spent a summer in the Adirondacks.

Cynthia proposed an armful of thick moss, while ease-loving Doris declared that for her part she preferred to bring out a hammock.

"What makes you so quiet, Jibby?" demanded Sin, as they stepped forth into the open, under the skyey roof.

"I feel in my heart what I have no words to say," murmured the Indian girl.

"Our neighbors would be quite as well pleased, perhaps, if we were all as quiet as Stella," suggested Ethan, quickly.

"What neighbors do you mean? Uncle Si doesn't care how much noise we make," remarked literal Doris.

"No; but my oven-bird does," and the boy pointed out a shy, golden-

crowned bird that was apparently reconnoitering the gay party with some anxiety, from behind a sheltering clump of laurel.

"Is its nest near by?" "Oh, show us, do!" came from one and another.

The nest was a curious one, oven-shaped, as the bird's name would suggest, with an opening at the side through which the first of four speckled eggs could be dimly seen. But Ethan would not allow them to come too near, or linger too long. The little mother was already uttering cries of distress, and feigning lameness to draw them away from her treasure.

"How is your crow doing?" queried Miss Morrison, as they all sat down on the threshold of their "House in the Woods" to christen it with the first social meal. It had been settled that there was to be a stone hearth laid for coffee-boiling before the next Saturday.

"Fine," Ethan responded, throwing an apple high in the air, and catching it skilfully as it fell. "He can walk 'most as well as ever, and eats out of my hand. I'm thinking of slitting his tongue and teaching him to talk," he added.

"Ethan found a young crow with his leg broken, by stone-throwing boys, probably, and set it quite successfully," the teacher explained to Stella, who glowed visibly, but said nothing.

"Well, Doctor, I promise to send for you next time I fall out of the cherry-tree," crowed Sin, whose climbing days were by no means over, in spite of Grandma Brown.

"Uncle Si is getting ready to go to bed by this time, and we ought to be going home to supper," announced Doris, soberly, as the April sun dropped into a bank of haze in the quiet west.

"'Silas Wolcott is dreadful sot,' as

Grandma Brown says," chimed in Ethan. "Many's the time he's been offered a good price, in hard cash, for this bit of pine, but his answer is always the same. 'It's been in the family for quite some time: I guess I won't sell just yet.'

"You know, don't you, that he's never missed being in his bed by seven o'clock in the evening, winter or summer, for forty years? That's just one of his little ways. He's got lots of them; one's drinking buttermilk three times a day, and another is never setting foot inside a church. I forget how that started, but they say he stood just outside an open window at Doris' mother's wedding! But for all that he's a good-hearted old chap as ever lived, and I wish he was *my* uncle," the boy ended, honestly enough.

And the stranger, who was already forgetting her strangeness, secretly echoed the wish.

"Oh, these dear, real people!" she said to herself, as they all turned homeward together, leaving the darling House in the Woods to its invisible neighbors and companions of the night. "They are all so — so *folksy*, as Grandma Brown says. It really does begin to seem as if I *belonged!*"

CHAPTER VI

A WILD WEST PERFORMANCE

"OH, Doris, darling! how can I bear it? The very meanest, disappointingest thing that ever happened in this world! Oh, oh!" and poor Sin threw herself face downward on the grass in Doctor Brown's back yard and sobbed tumultuously. All of her friend's blandishments were of no effect, and she remained dead to the world until Scotty's cold nose poked inquisitively into her ear aroused her at last. Springing to her feet, she rebuked him with energy, and only then consented to retail her woes.

"Buffalo Bill's coming to Westwood next week, and will you believe it, mother won't take me! Says it's too hot, and

circuses and such things always give her a headache. And you know it's been the *dream of my life* to see Buffalo Bill! There now, Doris Brown, see if you wouldn't cry!"

"Um, um," was all Doris said, for she was a maid of action rather than of many words. The case, as it seemed to her, was by no means hopeless, but she reserved her judgment.

Having had her cry out and relieved her feelings, Cynthia was soon engaged in a boisterous game with Sir Walter and an old tennis-ball that he had rooted out of some hiding-place or other, while canny Doris slipped into the house and shortly returned with a plate full of Mother Brown's famous raisin cookies, and a piece of news that quite electrified her impulsive friend.

"Mother says, if your mother'll let you go with us, she'll take a party to

Westwood to the matinee — you an' me an' Stella an' Ethan an' Miss Morrison too, if she wants to go," she calmly stated.

And so it fell out that on the appointed Saturday afternoon in July, a radiantly happy party of six occupied seats in the big tent; the three girls looking their prettiest in simple white frocks, Ethan solemn as an owl in glasses and a natty linen suit, and good Mrs. Brown sweltering in the inevitable black dress of village propriety, but all alike absorbed in the stirring spectacle.

The Rough Riders of all nations and costumes; the wonderful rifle-shooting of the short-skirted, sombreroed cow-girl, the hair-raising hold-up of the ancient stage-coach — each and all yielded a separate thrill; but of course the best of all were the Indians — real, painted, plumed, ferocious warriors and daring

horsemen of the plains! Everybody drew a long breath when they galloped into the arena.

"Doesn't it make you think of home?" whispered Cynthia to Stella, with characteristic frankness speaking out what the others had only thought.

"Well, you see," objected Yellow Star, "our men all dress like farmers now, and 'most all wear their hair short. *I* never saw anything like this before — except once on a Fourth of July, when some white people paid our Indians to dress up and give a war-dance."

"But — but they used to dress this way?" faltered Sin, rather taken aback, while the rest pricked up their ears.

"Well, not when they went to war, anyway. They wouldn't want to be bothered with all those fixings if they really had to ride far, or fight, or anything like that. I think, myself, they only

dressed up at councils and dances, and maybe not quite so much, even then," (with just a flicker of a smile.) " I know one thing: lots of those beaded things are not Sioux."

" Not Sioux, my dear! Why, what do you mean? " wondered Mrs. Brown.

" You see, Mrs. Brown," explained Stella, " most of these very men are Sioux from our agency. I used to hear Father Waring and the agent talking about the show people. There are men at home, and a few women, that have been all over this country and in England and France and Germany. One of them brought home a German wife who didn't know a word of our language, and he couldn't speak German, either!

" Now, here they are, dressed up in all the beaded things they could make or beg or borrow from some other tribe — not Sioux at all! To us, that looks as if you

wore a fireman's boots and trousers and a priest's cassock and a soldier's hat," she suggested, with another little quirk at the corners of the serious mouth, but subsided when she observed that several people beside their own party were listening with evident interest.

After the performance, four or five of the Indians passed out among the audience, and as they approached the Laurel party, Yellow Star gazed earnestly into their painted faces. She recognized several, but hesitated to speak to these men, whom, as a modest young girl of her people, she would not have thought of addressing at home, much as she longed to hear again the dear accents of her mother tongue.

At last, however, there came a woman with a child on her back, in its gorgeously beaded cradle, attracting the lion's share of interest and attention. Many gave

the mother a bit of silver in return for the privilege of a peep at its tiny face, or for one of the highly colored photographs she offered. When she actually held one out to Yellow Star among the rest, the girl couldn't help murmuring, in the soft syllables of their native Dakota:

"Oh, I am so glad to see you! Don't you know me? I am from home, too; I am The-One-who-was-left Alive!"

The woman stared, then seized Stella's hands eagerly and burst into a flood of low-voiced dialect. The two unconsciously made a picture which was thoroughly appreciated by several of the bystanders. The tall, slim girl in her virginal white frock and modest hat, with the big, black bow tying up her heavy braids of hair, stood glowing all over her expressive face and quite forgetting her shyness, while the sad and rather stolid countenance of the gaudily

attired stranger softened and brightened wonderfully at the sight of a friend.

"Oh, the dear baby!" cooed Yellow Star, presently, lifting a corner of the shawl and looking closely at the little olive face. "But he doesn't look well!" she exclaimed, anxiously.

"He is sick for two days now, and I know not what to do, for we must travel all time and it is so bad for him," grieved the mother, looking at her with the pleading black eyes of a hurt animal. "My husband, Young Eagle, he say it is nothing; but me, I not like to dress him up and take around for the white people to stare at when he is sick."

"Take him back to your tent, now, or wherever you stay, and bring Young Eagle to me. I will talk to him," flashed Yellow Star, and she turned to her party with an impulsive:

"I must go with her for a little while,

please: she is my friend; she is in trouble and among strangers."

"I'll go with you, dear," put in Miss Morrison, quickly. "We will meet you at the station, Mrs. Brown; or no — I must take an earlier train; but there is time to go with Stella and the baby first — " and before any one could speak they were all three lost in the crowd, followed by admiring and envious glances from Cynthia and Doris, who fancied that a glimpse behind the scenes must hold more of wonder and romance than all the rest.

Neither Stella nor her teacher was at the station when the others arrived, and after a thorough search took the 5.40 train, remembering that Miss Morrison had said something about an engagement, and having to leave early, and in any case she would surely have kept Stella with her.

Great was the consternation, therefore, when they reached Laurel and found that Mrs. Waring had seen or heard nothing of her "little girl," while a telephone message to Miss Morrison disclosed the fact that she had been obliged to hurry away and leave Stella with her new-found friends, who were to see that she met her party at the station in time for the 5.40.

The long, hot, dusty day was sinking into twilight, and the precious waif last seen with a travelling show, in a strange city twenty miles from home! Miss Morrison was conscience-smitten, Lucy Waring in tears, in which Cynthia and Doris were quite ready to join, and poor Mrs. Brown all but overcome by this unexpected ending to their exciting day.

There was no train for Westwood that night. Of course, there were always the telegraph and telephone, but no one knew just how to reach any responsible person,

or even whether the "Wild West" might not be already on its way to Hartford or elsewhere. That, Miss Sophia said, was in all probability the case.

"You may be sure," she announced, with her usual cold precision, "that the wretched child has run away with the show. What else could you expect, indeed, after deliberately putting her in the way of temptation? You will remember that I advised against it from the first. The sight of the beads and feathers and all the rest of the savage finery was too much for her, no doubt, and she will be exhibiting herself in them, if possible, this very evening. Perhaps this painful incident may convince you, my dear Lucy, that you can not make a silk purse out of a sow's ear!"

After all, the only person to keep all his wits about him in this emergency was Ethan Honey. That youth stopped to

consult nobody, but hastily recollecting that an express train for Westwood stopped at the next town, three miles off, in twenty minutes, he felt in his pockets to assure himself that he had just money enough for the fare, sprang on his bicycle and was off. Breathless and dusty, he arrived barely in time to turn the wheel over to the agent and board the express, which landed him at eight o'clock in the evening, anxious, supperless and penniless, among the flaring lights of the big town.

CHAPTER VII

BEHIND THE SCENES

THE corner of the big sleeping-tent allotted to Young Eagle and his wife and baby was untidy enough, with a smell of paints and grease and buckskin on the hot, close air. Dexterously Yellow Star rolled the baby out of his heavy, beaded cradle and took him in her arms.

He was quiet, even for an Indian baby; unnaturally quiet, she thought; and there was a pinched look about the tiny, expressionless features that went straight to her heart.

The mother had gone at once to look for Young Eagle, so that for the minute she and Miss Morrison and the baby were all alone in this strange, confused place.



He was quiet, even for an Indian baby; unnaturally quiet, she thought. *Page 88.*

There was no chance to sit down, even, and altogether it was queer and uncomfortable.

"They must have a doctor at once," pronounced Miss Morrison. Then she fidgeted a little, and looked at her watch.

"What shall we do, dear?" she exclaimed. "I have only just time to catch my train if I start at once; and I *must* get back early. Yet I don't know how to leave you here by yourself."

"But I am quite safe," Stella answered, rather absently, her soft eyes on the sick baby's apathetic face. "Young Eagle can take me to the station to meet the others."

"Then don't fail to get there by half-past five, and wait for them in the small waiting-room. If they get a good doctor, it will be all right. You're sure you won't come with me? Then good-by, dear." And Stella was left alone.

After long minutes, during which she did what little she could for baby's comfort, the young husband and wife appeared, he looking rather sulky and shamefaced, but nevertheless yielding to the peremptory orders, issued in crisp Dakota, of the tall, grave-faced girl in white, who had thrown off her hat and was taking full command of the situation. Blue Earth obediently washed some of the vermilion from her round cheeks, and rolled up a corner of the tent to let in the fresh air, crooning over all her troubles meanwhile to this strangely sympathetic listener, who seemed, with the unexpected demand upon her, to have grown years older in the last hour.

When the doctor came at last, it was already too late for the train; but that Yellow Star did not realize at once. To tell the truth, she had forgotten all about Laurel for the time being, and was back

among the simple, lovable, swarthy folk of her earliest recollections. She listened intently to the doctor's words, which she interpreted with care and intelligence.

"Now, Doctor," said she, after administering the first spoonful of medicine with her own hand, and giving the docile young mother her final instructions, "if you will come with me and Young Eagle, please, we must find the man in charge and tell him that Blue Earth and the baby can not be in the show again until he is well."

The child had entirely forgotten herself, and her Laurel friends would have been astonished to see her thus taking the lead and calmly laying down the law to strange men, both white and red.

When she returned from her interview, bringing with her the "boss's" promise that the woman and child should not be required to appear for three days, or

longer if necessary, supper was served, and she gravely accepted her share of the bread and ham and a thick cup filled with steaming coffee. They ate and drank, sitting upon upturned boxes and still talking — talking in soft elisions of home and the free winds and open skies — home and the childhood scenes that seemed already so far away.

It was dark now; eight o'clock, and the evening performance had begun. Stella learned that the last train for Laurel would leave in an hour, but she had no escort, not even to the station. Everybody was in the show-tent except Blue Earth, and she could not leave the baby. Besides, she knew even less than did our little girl of the mazes of the city streets. She must soon set out alone to inquire her way; and with the thought, for the first time that day, she felt a thrill of something like fear.

Suddenly a familiar face, atop of a tall, boyish figure, appeared around a pile of boxes. It was Ethan, who fairly beamed with relief when he caught sight of her, though he only said:

"Well, little girl, are you about ready to go home?"

"Oh, yes!" she cried, springing eagerly to her feet. "Oh, have you really been waiting for me all this time, Ethan? How kind of you!" and her puzzled eyes rested for a moment upon his mussed linen suit, and then flitted over the strong features, somewhat sharpened by worry and fatigue.

But Ethan did not explain, and Stella was slowly, very slowly, emerging from her dream. There were few words exchanged between the two, as they made their way through back streets to the railway station, after an undemonstrative farewell between the two girls who, in

everything but the common heritage of race, were so very far apart.

Once Ethan asked her if she had had any supper; and again, rather anxiously, it seemed, whether she had money enough for her ticket.

"Oh, yes!" she said at once, handing him her little purse with the ticket and two or three dollars in silver.

He left her for a few minutes in the ladies' waiting-room, and after he had seen her to the brilliantly lighted train and found her a seat, he handed back the purse.

"I took out fifteen cents, to telephone Mrs. Waring," he carefully explained. "She will meet your train at Laurel. Now you are all right, aren't you? You aren't afraid to travel alone, are you? It's less than an hour, you know."

"But what about you, Ethan?" she wondered. "You're coming, too, aren't

you? " and she instinctively made room for him beside her, as the train began slowly to glide out of the station.

" I can't," he answered, briefly. " Good night, Stella! " and next moment he had swung himself off the step and disappeared in the darkness.

It was seventeen miles through the whispering summer night to the little station where he had left his wheel. He reached it soon after the midnight freight, and found the station agent awake, mounted and rode the rest of the way home, where the first thing he did was to rummage in the pantry for the materials of a satisfactory supper, and the next, to go to bed and sleep 'round the clock.

" I couldn't borrow from a girl, you know," was all Ethan said, when questioned about his midnight tramp. " And besides, it was great. Such a lark! "

To himself he said: "I shall never forget the talking leaves, the wood smells, the company of the stars."

Stella came fully to herself on the short ride home, and was all tender repentance and self-blame when she fell into the arms of her kind foster-mother, on the deserted platform, with the one arc-light shivering overhead.

"Oh, mother! I never thought you might be anxious. I never thought of people looking for me. I'm afraid I never thought of anything but the poor little sick baby — and Blue Earth in such trouble, among strange white people. I wanted to help."

"Yes, darling; mother understands. And you are safe home, now, thanks to that dear, bright boy. We won't say any more about it," answered gentle Lucy Waring.

But, although nothing more was said — for Lucy had contrived somehow to silence even Miss Sophia — Stella seemed to everybody a good deal older, after her Wild West adventure. She was now nearly fifteen, and the eager, child-like wish *to belong* was already partly obscured by the more womanly and deeper desire *to help*. She wrote to Blue Earth, in their own tongue, and received in the course of a week or two a soiled scrawl in reply, saying only that the baby was well now. There seemed nothing more to be done for them, or for any of her own people — not just now, at any rate — and the girl set herself in good earnest to be a real help to the kind people of her adoption.

So she rose an hour earlier every morning, and quietly took upon herself more of the burden of household duties, turning them off so dexterously that Lucy War-

ing, who had failed perceptibly in the past year, accepted the relief almost unconsciously, and even Miss Sophia had no open fault to find.

"If I could only please Miss Sophia," grieved Yellow Star. "But I know I never can, for I can't change myself into something else. She dislikes me because I am Indian," was the unspoken thought, and it cut deep.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RIGHT STUFF

WHEN September came round, Stella entered the old academy with Doris and Cynthia and the rest, and found a new and absorbing world opening before her. Laurel academy was an endowed school, and a really good one, with better-paid teachers and more up-to-date equipment than the little town could have provided out of its own slender resources.

Ethan had been duly graduated and was going away to college, where for two or three momentous years the girls were seldom to see him, since he was "working his way through," and found it necessary to devote the long vacations to more paying, though not half so

pleasant things as doing "chores" for kind old Uncle Si.

The girls had now fairly entered upon a period of life in which boys cease to be "horrid things," and girls are no longer considered "too silly for anything," and it soon became evident that, of the three friends, Doris was by far the most mature socially. She was undoubtedly a pretty girl, with big blue eyes, fascinating hair of an amber tint, and a skin like a rose-leaf — a belle and a flirt in her demure, village fashion long before her sixteenth birthday.

Cynthia, to her languid mother's discontent, but her father's secret satisfaction, was at the same age a long-limbed, lanky, boyish-looking girl, with decidedly boyish manners, and only the frankest and least flattering interest in the ruder sex. As for Stella, the country youths admired her from a distance,

while she, for her part, had no time for them.

"I do despise long skirts; they get in your way so!" Sin complained, as the three were scaling a friendly stone wall on a pleasant Saturday in the following spring, taking their favorite "short cut" to Wolcott's Woods.

The others laughed. "You do act just like a boy in petticoats," reproved Doris. "You don't seem to know how to manage them a bit. There — you're caught again!" as Cynthia sprang recklessly from the top of the wall, to the accompaniment of a sharp sound of rending cloth.

"I don't care!" Sin was bent on braving the matter out, and, to her friends' horror, she calmly tore off a long strip of blue serge and threw it away. "Nonsense; I never mend. Daddy'll give me a new skirt out of the store any

time I ask him. I hate clothes, and I hate sewing. I'm sure I don't know why I was born a girl."

"What shall you wear to the dance?" asked Doris of Stella, as they strolled lovingly side by side. Cynthia, her friends thought, was in a mood that would best be ignored.

"My dotted swiss, I suppose; do you think it will do?"

"Mother is making me a new silk muslin — pale blue; and I've got a sash to match and new slippers. It's two inches longer than my last." Doris' voice was full of innocent satisfaction. "You look perfectly stunning in white, Stella," she added, generously. "And you're the best dancer of anybody in our set. Isn't she, Sin?"

Mrs. Waring had insisted upon giving Stella two terms of dancing lessons, with the others, much to her sister's disgust;

and here the native grace of the Indian girl stood her in good stead. It must be admitted that, if she did not particularly care for boys, she did love dancing; it was almost like flying, she thought.

"Um, h'm," assented Sin, who was born without a sense of rhythm, and never seemed to know what to do with her arms and legs. "I don't see what either of you want to dance for, though; I hate it, myself. Catch me going to their old party! Give me a warm corner and an interesting story, when it's too dark to go out. Scotty! Come here at once — here, sir!"

But, as usual, the obstreperous Sir Walter declined to budge, and his mistress found it necessary to follow up and forcibly detach him from a promising burrow.

"What a tom-boy she is! I don't

believe Sin will *ever* grow up," Doris lamented. "Are you looking for anything in particular to-day, Jibby, dear?"

"Trailing arbutus for Miss Sophia. I believe she'd rather have it than anything; and you know that little warm nook in the pines, south of our House in the Woods? It *ought* to be out, just there," answered Yellow Star, eagerly, looking as if she would coax the pale buds open with the warm shining of her dusky face.

"Too early; and besides, I don't see why you're always wanting to do something special for that cross old maid, Jibby," objected Sin, who had come back within ear-shot. "*She* never does anything for *you*, does she? I'm going to get some flowers for Doris' mother, if there are any. Her cookies are awfully good."

"I shall take mine to Miss Morrison," observed Doris. "But I've got to go round by Uncle Si's first; mother said he

wasn't feeling very well the last she heard, and she told me to be sure and stop. Will you come too, girls, or would you rather go on? "

"I will come," agreed Stella, at once.

"I won't, then," remarked Sin, who was unusually contrary to-day, the others thought. "I can't bear sick people, and he may be awfully sick for all we know! And then, you never can tell what Uncle Si is going to say next."

It was quite true. You never could tell; and his first words to-day made both girls jump, coming unexpectedly, as they did, in Uncle's small, squeaky voice, through the open window of the "kitchen chamber," where he always slept.

"Look out for the bull, gals! Dunno 'zactly where he is, but he's certain on the rampage, 'n' *I* can't do a thing. Been under the weather these two days. No,

no breakfast, nor supper neither; didn't want it bad enough to git up 'n' git it. What's that, Doris? Wa'al, the door ain't locked, if ye *will* come in."

In five minutes Stella had a brisk fire going in the kitchen stove, and in ten more the tea-kettle was singing cheerily, toast made, tea put to draw, and two fresh eggs from the hay-mow " coddled " to perfection. She had been well trained in waiting upon a fussy would-be invalid.

Doris had found her uncle lying, fully dressed, upon the bed, covered with a gay patchwork quilt, and looking worried and feverish. She succeeded in arranging his pillows and putting the room to rights before the arrival of the tray; and while Stella deftly helped the old man to take some nourishment, Doris prudently closed both doors and telephoned to her mother.

"There! she'll see that he's taken care of properly, if he *is* 'queer as Dick's hatband,' as Grandma says," observed his niece. "She's always saying that 'for a man to live alone as he does and cook his own vittles is flyin' in the face of Providence,' and she 'hasn't no manner of doubt that Silas'll be found dead in his bed, some fine morning.' Well, I hope not, I'm sure! Now we must go right away and find Cynthia; no telling what mischief *she's* up to, by this time."

"Or the bull, either," thought Yellow Star; but she said nothing, for she knew her friend's weakness. In the excitement of taking care of Uncle Si, his niece had forgotten all about the bull. If not, Stella knew well that poor Cynthia would be left to her fate, so far as timid Doris was concerned. Why, even the most harmless cow that ever lowed would send her flying from the huckleberry

pasture, and folks said the Wolcott bull was dangerous.

So only one of the girls kept a sharp lookout as they passed the open barnyard gate and crossed the pasture toward Wolcott's Woods. On its distant verge, a fleck of scarlet showed plainly — Cynthia's old red cape. And — yes! A lumbering, dark shape had already started leisurely in pursuit of the scarlet fleck.

Stella saw the bull first, and walked on faster. Then Doris saw, grew white as a sheet and instantly turned to run, oblivious of the fact that Taurus had his back toward them, and his eye too evidently upon Cynthia.

"Help! help!" she screamed, as she fled; but there was neither house nor man within half a mile.

Stella resolutely advanced, keeping close to the wire fence that separated the big pasture from their much-loved woods.

Cynthia had discovered her danger and was running gallantly, but had not thought to drop her red cape. And she had been caught in the open field, far from fence or tree. Sir Walter had left her side, and was barking hoarsely and making little ineffectual dashes at the bull, that, together with her headlong flight, merely served to provoke his curiosity into wrath. Giving a terrifying bellow, he set off at full speed.

Yellow Star had seen much of wild Texas cattle at the agency, where they are issued to the Indians "on the hoof," as a monthly ration. Furthermore, Sir Walter had long since learned to obey the girl from Dakota as he never dreamed of obeying his impetuous little mistress. Her flute-like whistle was enough to bring him galloping to her side. Cynthia, too, turned half-way toward her at the sound, stumbled and fell at full length.

The bull was still plunging heavily along, and Stella, who had hoped to draw him off in her direction and then slip through the wire fence out of reach, found scant time for any such maneuver. Desperately she sent Sir Walter flying back to bark and snap at his heels, while she herself stood still and uttered a long ringing cry.

He stumbled, half turned — and hark! the strange, challenging cry was repeated again and again, until it actually brought him to a halt but a few paces from poor Sin, who had struggled to her feet and was sobbing aloud as she tried to run with a twisted ankle. And now the bewildered animal stood pawing the sod and bellowing in hoarse response, until both girls had reached a place of safety.

"Well, that *was* a close call, and no mistake!" Cynthia had quite recovered

her spirits in the course of an hour or so, and was obviously enjoying her own importance as the heroine of so rare an adventure, while she nursed her sprained ankle on the shabby cushions of Doctor Brown's top-buggy. Poor Doris, still pale and tearful, was squeezed in between Cynthia and the Doctor, while Mrs. Brown remained in temporary charge of her protesting brother, and Stella, who had insisted upon walking, was already far ahead.

The gruff Doctor assented, with an appraising eye, meanwhile, upon the solitary girlish figure moving so rapidly before them, along the hilly country road. The Doctor was not a man of unnecessary words; but if he had spoken out his thought just then, it would have sounded something like this:

"There's the right stuff in that girl — no question about it! I wonder —"

CHAPTER IX

GLIMPSES OF OLD AMERICA

WHEN Uncle Si, getting "so's to be 'round" again, heard all about Stella and the Wolcott bull, the immediate results were two.

First, the bull was promptly sold — a surprising occurrence to those who best knew Silas Wolcott and his deep-rooted objection to disposing of any "critter" whatsoever that had been raised on the home place. No fowl was too old or too tough for home consumption, and indeed Uncle had developed no mean skill in softening gallinaceous tissues and imparting a delicious flavor by braising for twelve hours or thereabouts, with peppercorns and sweet herbs, in an old-fashioned bean-pot. But superfluous calves and

superannuated horses were said to owe their immunity from sale to the fact that they had been "born on the old farm," a fact which to his mind appeared to constitute a lifelong claim upon its hospitality.

Consequence number two, our heroine was actually adopted, to the extent of being formally requested to call the old man "Uncle," which she shyly but joyfully proceeded to do. It was one more milestone on her long and often lonely road to "some really true relations."

Now among the strictly home-bred stock on the Wolcott acres was a small herd of deer, as jealously guarded and almost as tame as if they had adorned the stately park of some English earl. Stella heard with intense, though undemonstrative, interest of this unexpected renaissance of wild life among the New England hills.

"Why, Mother Waring," she confided, "you know they're almost gone from our Dakota prairies, where there used to be so many. Think how hard it is for the women to get any deerskin for moccasins! And how *can* there be deer here where white people have lived for hundreds of years?"

"There weren't any when I was a little girl," Mrs. Waring observed. "I believe they have come back because for many years now they have been protected; that means, you know, that nobody is allowed to kill them. Seems to me I've heard that there are supposed to be several thousand in this State; and now a law has been passed that for one week this fall they may be shot," she added, doubtfully.

"Uncle Si won't have his shot," insisted Stella. "He has printed signs up all over his woods, with something about

'the penalty of the law.' Mother, I do so want to see a deer! and he says there are three that come to drink at the Cold Spring almost every evening. We've seen their tracks — a buck, a doe, and a dear little fawn," the sweet voice pleaded. "But we always have to come home early so's to be in time for tea."

"So you do, darling," assented her foster-mother, her gentle, puzzled gaze upon Stella's earnest face. She knew by instinct that the child had a special favor to ask — she who had always found it hard to ask favors.

Out it came at last. "Cynthia is just as wild about the deer as I am; and — and — Mother dear — Uncle Si says we can come some Saturday and he'll show them to us if we can keep quiet enough; and Dr. Brown has promised to drive us out there and back — Doris too, though Doris is a teeny bit afraid of the old

buck's horns — if you're willing, and don't mind my being out after dark just this once." She was quite breathless, now.

"Why, yes, I think so — if the Doctor is kind enough to take charge of you — " Mrs. Waring got no further, for the sentence was interrupted at this point with a strangling hug.

After Stella had actually seen the deer, which happened before many weeks, the four friends had an earnest discussion upon the subject of the coming week of slaughter.

Ethan had lately become quite an adept with bow and arrows, which suggested to him the bright idea of going into the merry greenwood with the romantic equipment of a Robin Hood or a Hiawatha. He rather looked for the admiration of the girls, and especially of Yellow Star, and had even gone so far as to picture himself triumphantly bringing in

the deer on his shoulders, and gallantly throwing it down at Mrs. Waring's kitchen door. Rather to the boy's resentment, however, she proved most unsympathetic.

"How can you think of such a thing?" she protested, "and after we have all watched the darling things drinking out of Uncle's spring! I don't call it hunting to go out and kill them when they are so tame, almost like pets."

"I hope you don't think I propose to shoot on posted land," remarked Ethan with some dignity. "I know just where I shall go; on the south side of the mountain there's a regular deer path; and it isn't like gunning, let me tell you, with the buckshot scattering every which way; and beside, the farmers down that way are glad enough to have the deer killed — they do no end of damage to the young fruit trees."

"I should say so; why, those very deer that Uncle Si thinks so much of got into the garden one night, and ruined all his early peas," chimed in sensible Doris. "If it had been his next-door neighbor's calves, wouldn't there have been a row, or even a lawsuit, may be."

"Well, rather," observed Ethan, glad of a champion. "That's just why the law was passed providing for one week's open season; the deer are getting to be regular nuisances all over this part of the state. Pretty soon the farmers will have to build high fences to keep them off the growing crops."

"It's letting them think no one is going to hunt them, till they forget to be afraid, and then turning an army of men and boys loose on the poor things all of a sudden, that *I* don't like," broke in Cynthia impulsively. "It's all very well talking about the law, but what do

the deer know about your old law? It isn't fair, and I hate anything that's not fair."

"And it has seemed so like home, ever since I knew for certain there were wild deer in these woods," breathed Stella. "Girls, I keep fancying we'll come upon some wigwams, some time, of those old Indians who lived here two hundred years ago. I suppose there aren't any bounties offered for their scalps nowadays; and just suppose *they* should come back, like the deer!"

The young folks were picnicking, as usual, in the edge of that bit of first-growth pine that Uncle was so proud of, and at Stella's words all glanced furtively about, as if half expecting to glimpse a ragged birch-bark dwelling, or even one of the soft-footed braves revisiting his native haunts in these venerable woods. After all, it was they who were the in-

truders. Ethan looked decidedly shaken, but matter-of-fact Doris remarked bluntly:

"If they did come back, they wouldn't kill the deer for one week, but every day in the year. I thought Indians were always hunting, when they weren't on the war-path killing people; and *you* needn't say anything, Stella Waring, so there!"

However, when the open season actually came round with November, Ethan decided that he was "too busy" to take a day off in the woods, which Stella's fancy had peopled for him with stealthy shadows, and friendly wreaths of blue smoke from well-hidden wigwams. It was Thanksgiving before they all met again at Uncle Si's place, and found him "as mad as a hatter."

"Spent more'n half o' that week patrolin' the woods with a shotgun, and givin' fools that couldn't read plain English a

piece o' my mind," he explained, grimly. "Howsomever, the blamed racket scared my deer so't I've never seen 'em since, and most likely I sha'n't agin."

"What a shame!" cried Sin, and poor Stella looked too much distressed to speak. She had tried not to think of the timid creatures harried and wounded, of antlered heads laid low, of the blood-drops on the leaves.

"Have you ever noticed this big rock in the middle of the pasture? — noticed it very specially, I mean," she suggested, as they made their way around the giant boulder, towering high above their heads like a rude altar. "I always think, what if it was right here the Indians used to make their prayers and offerings! Great-grandfather Inyan — that's what we Dakotas call a rock like that. And there must have been water-spirits — what you call fairies — about uncle's

ever-flowing spring. Oh, Cynthia and Doris! I should think you girls would care more about the *old* America. You're proud of being Americans; and there may be prettier stories belonging to these very hills than those we read in school about the Roman nymphs and the old Norse thunder-gods."

"But where would we find them?" asked Doris, much impressed.

"Try the Historical Society," Ethan suggested.

"I'm going straight to the library," proclaimed Cynthia, "and next time we come for a day in the woods, we'll each of us tell an 'Old America' story. What do you say, girls?"

An hour later, they had scattered in search of princess-pine and Christmas ferns, squaw-berries and moss, and Stella, at some little distance from the others,

was carefully lifting a clump of hepaticas for Miss Sophia's fernery, when she suddenly thought she heard a faint, whimpering noise.

The blood fairly crinkled in her veins. Dropping basket and trowel, she set herself to follow up the cry which came again and yet again, a plaintive, muffled, half-human sound that was almost like a baby's smothered wail. At last her quick eye detected a misplaced leaf. The faint trail led straight to a dense thicket of laurel where a small creature lay motionless, so near the color of the dead leaves in which it nestled that to most eyes it would have been invisible.

With one quick spring she was upon it, and had flung both arms around the neck of a half-grown fawn, which had been wounded in the side, and was too weak to struggle much. Then she raised her voice in a loud cry.

"Ethan! Cynthia! Oh, E — E — than!"

"It's Stella's fawn, now," piped Uncle Si Wolcott. They were all in the big farmhouse kitchen; Stella on the floor with the fawn's head on her lap, and a saucer of milk beside her; Cynthia swinging her long limbs from her favorite perch on the edge of the table, and the others standing around in admiring attitudes. "Doctor Ethan" had carefully washed the wound, and pronounced it not serious.

"Th' game warden's a pretty good friend o' mine," he went on, with a twinkle, "and I don't guess there'll be any trouble about her keepin' it for a pet if she wants to."

The three girls exploded in a simultaneous "Oh!" of delight, but next instant a look of almost laughable be-

wilderment overspread their faces. The same thought had occurred to them all at the same time. Miss Sophia!

"*Do* you suppose she'll let you?" queried Sin in awestruck tones, while the others held their breath. No one but Cynthia would dare to say things right out like that.

"You might have a little house for him, down by the chicken-coop," quavered Doris.

Stella was thinking hard. No one knew how she wanted the waif for her own; and she felt sure that dear Mother Waring would not — could not refuse her. The question was, did Stella want her to pay the price?

They were all waiting for her to speak, and at last her clear voice broke the silence.

"The fawn is something like me," it began, pitifully. "You see, don't you?

It's wild; it hasn't any relations. I know just how a wild orphan feels, and I'm afraid it wouldn't want to live in Miss Sophia's chicken-coop and have her all the time wishing it wasn't there. Uncle Si, if you would only be willing to let the fawn stay in the barn-yard with the calves, and if I could just *call* it mine, and come and feed it sometimes?"

There was a soft brightness in the black eyes, as if tears were not far off, and everybody began talking at once, trying to drown the thought of the two "wild orphans" clinging together, and the utter hopelessness of an appeal to Miss Sophia.

"Think the critter'd be most as unpop'lar as Ethan's rattlesnakes, hey?" chuckled Uncle Si.

"*What?*" screamed Doris and Cynthia, together, and the boy blushed to the roots of his hair.

"Well, you know, that was a long time ago," he muttered, but Uncle mercilessly continued:

"Said they wa'n't dangerous at all, *if ye knew how to handle 'em* — pick 'em up by the scruff o' the neck, like blind kittens; wa'n't that it, Ethan? Studied a heap on the subjick, he had. 'Uncle,' says he, 'they don't need to eat a thing fer six months to a year;' an' I says, 'There orter be a good bit o' profit in boarding 'em,' says I. But Ethan, he says as how he can get five dollars apiece from a *mu*seum; and he has a pair o' boots made to come up to his waist, pretty nigh; an' he tramps over to Rattlesnake Gulch one mornin' afore daylight, so as to ketch 'em crawlin' out o' their holes, most likely."

Every eye was fixed upon the speaker, except that of his victim, who wriggled

uneasily and vainly tried to break into the conversation.

"Ethan allers did go in fer makin' money, ye know," pursued Uncle, enjoying his success. Wouldn't take along any whisky fer bites, though I offered him all I had left, sayin' as how it was a wuss pizen than the snake's an' not accordin' to modern methods. Wal, along about dark Ethan comes back pretty well tuckered out, carryin' a gunny-sack over his shoulder on the end of a stick. Didn't need to tell me there was a live rattler in that there gunny-sack! I could hear his tail a-goin' like an alarm-clock, an' every now an' then he'd strike out kinder vicious an' set the thing to wavin' back an' forth."

"How did you ever get him into the sack, Ethan?" begged Cynthia, much excited. Doris shuddered, and hid her face

in her hands, while Stella sat quite silent, with the fawn's head in her arms.

"Mischief of it was to git him out agin," remarked Uncle. "Ef Ethan ever got that five dollars, I will say he arned it. Just tell 'em what your aunt by marriage said when she stumbled over that gunny-sack in the woodshed an' found out what was in it, Ethan." But Ethan had slipped out to the barn, and was fixing up an unused box-stall for Stella's fawn.

"Gone, is he? Wal, all I can say is, Miss Sophia Russell ain't a circumstance to Mis' Honey on that occasion. Don't know as I blame her, neither. That pet o' yourn 'll be safe enough with your old uncle, Stella, an' you'll be out to tend to it every Sat'day, or I'll know the reason why."

CHAPTER X

NOBODY'S LITTLE GIRL

"IT doos beat all," declared Grandma Brown, with even more than her usual emphasis, "how blind own folks can be! I'll lay there ain't a man, woman nor child in Laurel township, save an' exceptin' Sophi' Spellman, that don't know Lucy's goin' straight into a decline. Weak lungs is in the fam'ly, to begin with; I can rec'lect when those gals' mother an' aunt both went off with the gallopin' consumption. Like as not, Lucy felt her husband's death a good deal; an' I've heerd tell how that Dakoty climate keys you right up till ye can't live anywheres else without snappin' off short.

"She's ben goin' down stiddy ever sence she come back home, that's flat;

an' here's that sister of hers tellin' folks as how 'it's jest a touch o' bronchitis,' an' 'she only wishes *she* had Lucy's conster-tution.'

"What's more, she has her breakfust in bed reg'lar, so I hear, for all the world like them ungodly folks in furrin parts, an' reads French novels on the sofy while Lucy an' Stella doos up the work. I declare for't, Emmeline, if somebody else don't do it pretty quick, I'll speak to Sophi' myself!"

Everybody knew that Grandma had succeeded in preserving to a good old age all the "spunk" and "snap" that seems to have perished, for the most part, with a past generation, and it is quite possible that, if opportunity had served, she would have faced down and outdone even the formidable Miss Sophia. Lucy's decline, however, had been so very gradual, and her ways so quiet and uncomplaining,

that even a sister might almost have been forgiven for not realizing how matters stood. As for her dear Sioux daughter, now a head taller than herself, and completing, to the eminent satisfaction of her teachers, her second year's work in the academy, to her it had seemed a sufficient explanation of everything that "mother was growing old!" For the fifties, and even the forties, of ripe middle age do seem "old" to sixteen.

After almost three years in Laurel, Yellow Star was growing fairly certain that she truly "belonged." Modest as she was, she could not help knowing that people liked her — all sorts of people — boys and girls and babies, intimates and strangers, sharp-tongued Grandma Brown and the gruff-spoken Doctor and "pernickety" Uncle Si. Even from Mary Maloney and Rosey Bernstein the Indian girl had wrung some measure of reluctant

admiration; but, in spite of much willing service, she remained vividly conscious of being still an outsider and an interloper in the eyes of Miss Sophia.

Now at last Doctor Brown had been sent for to see Lucy Waring. Everybody in Laurel, almost, had noticed his ancient roan steed and battered top-buggy before the Spellman gate. It was impossible to deny any longer, in the face of that long-postponed confession, what all the village tongues had been wagging with for months past. Lucy had "took to her bed," at last, and the end could not be very far off.

It came suddenly, after all; to Yellow Star with a suddenness almost as devastating as that storm of bullets and shell out of a clear sky which had left her stranded, a nameless brown waif, on the frozen December sod, some fifteen years before.

The spring term had slipped quickly away, with Miss Ward installed as nurse and Doctor Brown calling every other day; with Miss Sophia looking grimmer and grayer than ever, and Lucy's waxen face on the pillow relaxing into a loving smile as she repeated the daily formula which only Stella really believed:

"I shall be better to-morrow. Now the weather is getting so pleasant, I shall soon be out again."

Then, one sultry July day, after a long "spell" of exhausting heat, there had come an alarming faintness and a "hurry call" for the Doctor. Miss Sophia was hastily sent for from the kitchen, where she had been taking the indignant Mrs. Maloney to task for "nicking" her old blue china . . . and presently, to poor Stella sitting, desperately anxious and unhappy, on the top step of the dark stairway, just outside her foster-mother's

door, came, not even kind-hearted Doctor Brown, but the business-like, white-capped nurse, with her curt message:

"Miss Sophia says you need not sit there any longer, Stella; Mrs. Waring is dead."

Now, indeed, it was all Miss Sophia's house, she thought; and it "pushed her out," as she had said once when she first came to Laurel — pushed her away as with actual, bodily hands — a dark-skinned little alien, who did not "belong"! All of a sudden, she realized with dreadful sharpness that she was nothing, really, to that gentle soul who was gone, and who had pityingly taught the childish lips to call her "mother." No, she was no Waring except in name — much less a Spellman or a Russell; those ghostly portraits in the shuttered parlor below disowned and despised her; she was only

a stray — a foundling — only The-One-who-was-left-Alive.

Yellow Star sprang up and darted down the colonial stairway and out the sacred front door. The graveled, box-bordered walk echoed her flying feet, and the elm-trees, straining against a rising wind, seemed to peer anxiously after the light figure as it sped by. Then the gate clicked and she was away — away on the wings of the summer wind — not walking, scarcely even running, but *flying* toward the only near refuge her spirit knew, the dear, green, lonely House in the Woods!

Long before she could reach it, the storm broke. It was a storm that made timid Doris cower with her face hidden, there in her own mother's cheerful sitting-room; even the weary Doctor thanked his stars that he had gotten safe home and his horse " put up " before the rain came.

Yet it was not those silvery sheets of hissing water, drenching to the skin all who might be abroad, that one really minded — not at all! It was — ah! the play of forked lightnings, awfully bright, and the ear-splitting thunder-crash that could do no harm, one knew, but that was so dreadful for all that. Yellow Star's Indian blood fairly curdled within her in the face of this close strife of the elements; for brave as her people truly were, the angry moods of nature were to them full of threat and awful personality. And yet, to-night, her grief was such that even the forked tongues of the "Thunder Birds" could not really terrify her, and she ran on.

In the rude shelter raised by friendly hands and connected with some of the happiest hours of her short life, there among the grave neighbor pines hiding their frightened nestlings, the girl from

far Dakota cried aloud in long-forgotten Indian fashion — cried and mourned in rhythmic cadence, wild as the sobbing wind in the tree-tops — there told in her own dear tongue to those shivering sister woods all the secrets of her storm-tossed heart.

"Oh!" she cried, standing straight up in the tiny shack and flinging her strong young arms above the streaming black head with a tragic gesture, "oh, it is worse even than when I lost my own mother and was too young to know! I only knew what they told me — how they threw my poor Dakota mother into that awful pit, with no coffin and no prayer — and how I could never, never know her name or how she looked, or whether I was all the child she ever had, or anything! And the white man's cruel bullets had torn her poor body . . . and yet in all her pain her last thought was

for me . . . to keep me warm and alive. I meant to prove that I was *worth* keeping alive . . . and I hoped she might, somehow, know.

"And then, there were those kind Indian women — Blue Earth's mother, and Mrs. Driving Hawk, and the rest, who took care of me as well as they could. They were poor and very frightened and most had babies of their own, and it was very, very kind of them to feed a useless little fretting baby without any relations, whose people had nearly all been killed by the soldiers of the Great Father at Washington.

"To be sure, I have often heard my dear Mother Waring say that when she found me I was very dirty, and looked hungry and miserable. Many of the Dakota children who had mothers and fathers, too, were hungry, and 'most all were dirty, I'm afraid, back there on the

reservation. It wasn't all their fault; I know it wasn't.

"I was about five when Mother Waring took me away; very thin and ugly, and oh! so frightened of the white people! She used to tell me about it afterward, to make me laugh. She had my ragged little Dakota dress and moccasins put away, the ones I had on the day she took me home to her house, and washed and dressed and fed me, and put me at night in a clean, white bed next her own. I cried half that first night, she told me, and begged to go back to the Indian camp, where I might curl up in a dirty quilt in any one of half a dozen smoky teepees.

"Then, after awhile, I got fat and contented, and I loved her dearly, and began to be afraid of the Indian women. But she wouldn't have that, either; she always made me shake hands with them,

and wouldn't let me forget my own language when I learned the English. And I went to church and Sunday School and learned about Our Father who art in heaven; and after a great while Father and Mother Waring seemed just like my real father and mother on earth.

"Then dear Father Waring left us and went to heaven, too; and we came to Laurel to live. It's been beautiful here; all but Miss Sophia. I have so many friends in Laurel — I really did begin to think I belonged — and if I could only stay long enough to graduate, there are so many things I could do.

"But now I seem to see it all. Now Mother Waring is gone, I haven't any folks, anywhere. Miss Sophia doesn't love me a single bit. There are just Doris and her father and mother, and Cynthia and Grandma Brown and Uncle Si and Miss Morrison — yes, Ethan too,

though I haven't seen him for ever and ever so long — all just *friends*, not folks, — and I shall be left out of everything, again. Oh, dear! I am nobody's little girl!"

After supper that same evening, when the summer tempest had subsided to a gentle, purring down-pour of warm rain, and while Yellow Star, scarcely yet missed from the gloomy house of mourning, lay exhausted with crying on her bed of boughs, in her wet garments, away out in Wolcott's Woods, her good friends were discussing her future and the practical bearings of her great loss, with true village simplicity.

"It's jest as I say, an' you can depend on't," insisted Grandma Brown. "I ain't missed a funeral in these parts — not for forty-six years — that time I was bedfast, you recollect, Grampa? and

old Deacon Hewitt went and turned up his toes. Furthermore, there ain't ben a will made in Laurel all these years that I couldn't tell ye the heft on't.

"Deacon Spellman, he left that house an' money in bank to his two darters, Lucy an' Sophi', an' whichever one of 'em was to die fust the hull went to the survivor. You'll find out it's so; an' everything belongs to Sophi' Spellman now, onless Lucy an' her husband had contrived to save suthin' out of his pay, which wasn't no great, it stands to reason, him bein' not only a minister but a missionary to the heathen."

"I don't know but you're right, mother," the Doctor admitted, taking his pipe out of his mouth and resting his grizzled head on the worn leather cushions of his chair, with a tired sigh. "I do kind of hope, all the same, that some sort of provision will be made for that child

to finish her schooling. I should hate to see her packed off to the Indian reservation now, when her heart's set on graduating; and Stella deserves to graduate if ever a girl did."

"Of course I'm right, Ezry," observed Grandma, crisply. "And packed off she'll be in short order, or I miss *my* guess."

"It seems to me Sophia will want to do what's right by her only sister's adopted child," was Mrs. Brown's gentle suggestion, while Doris cried quietly, with her head buried in the sofa pillow.

"Seems to me, Emmeline," Grandma countered, briskly, "you'd orter know Sophi' Spellman better by this time. She's her granther Spellman over again; anybody outside the family connection was allers the dirt under his feet, in a manner of speakin'. Stella's a good gal, an' a smart gal, but she's no kin to

Sophi' that I know of. An' furthermore, she ain't even white folks, an' no Spellman by birth and nater could put up with that — not if she had the parts of an angel. Jest you wait an' see."

And, as usual, Grandma had the last word.

CHAPTER XI

JUST FRIENDS

IT was on the very day after the funeral that Miss Sophia had an unexpected caller, in the person of Cynthia's father, the proprietor of the largest dry-goods and grocery store in Laurel. She privately wondered what he had come for, but received him with a civility as chilling as the atmosphere of her shrouded "best room," and as unbending as the tall, spare figure in its gloom of unrelieved black.

Mr. Parker was a man of business, and went straight to the point.

"I hope you'll excuse my calling so soon, ma'am! I should be very sorry to intrude, but the fact is, I am particularly

interested in — ah! — in a present member of your family."

Here Miss Sophia visibly stiffened, and the gentleman cleared his throat, and made a fresh beginning.

"If I may be allowed to refer to the prospects of your — ahem! of the late Mrs. Waring's charge, I understand that it is proposed to — that her return to Dakota is — ah! — under consideration?"

"As to Stella," reluctantly responded Miss Sophia, "I do not quite see — begging your pardon, Mr. Parker — why my plans for the girl should be of particular interest to my neighbors. However, I have no objection to answering your question. Stella is sixteen — quite old enough to go to work, and, thanks to my sister's possibly mistaken kindness, has a far better education than either her antecedents or her circumstances call for.

It is high time, in my opinion, that she was getting in touch with her own people, and becoming accustomed to their mode of life, to which she has so long been a stranger.

"Her own inheritance from an ancestry of savages, Mr. Parker, betrays itself in such escapades as Stella indulged in on the night of my sister's death, when she ran away to the woods in a violent thunderstorm, was found by your dog, I believe, and brought home after dark by Mr. Silas Wolcott from his place on the Bay road. Such distressing outbreaks render it desirable, certainly, from my point of view, that her return be not delayed too long."

"That's about as I supposed, ma'am," gravely assented Mr. Parker, "and it is on that understanding that I have come here to-day to make a definite proposition to Miss Stella, and to you, as her

guardian. It is simply this: that I offer her a home with me, as my daughter's companion, for the next two years, or until she graduates from Laurel academy. She will be treated precisely like my own daughter, if she comes. I shall make her an allowance for dress, and so forth, and of course pay all of her expenses."

Poor Miss Sophia was taken entirely by surprise, and had to moisten her dry lips more than once before she could inquire:

"And what, may I ask, is your reason for this — this extraordinary offer?"

"Miss Stella, ma'am," responded Mr. Parker, with unmoved politeness, "is, as you are perhaps aware, my daughter's most intimate friend. Cynthia is an only child, and, I am sorry to say, rather a lonely one. She has her little peculiarities, Miss Spellman, like the rest of us, and her mother and I have every reason

to be satisfied with your ward's influence." (Here Miss Sophia indulged in an unmistakable sniff.)

"In addition to this, my daughter firmly believes that Miss Stella saved her life from the Wolcott bull, not a great while ago, which of course puts us all in her debt; and, in short, Cynthia says that she will not graduate without her." (Another sniff.) "And besides," firmly continued Mr. Parker, with perhaps a secret enjoyment of the situation, "the fact is, ma'am, her friends all feel that Miss Stella is a girl of — ahem! — unusual abilities, and ought by all means to complete her education."

"Of course, Mr. Parker, I shall require some time to think this matter over." Miss Sophia spoke rather feebly, after a long pause. "The suggestion is an unexpected one, and — and — However, I shall mention it to the girl, and —

By the way, Mr. Parker, you may not be aware that my sister left her by will all of her personal property, and a sum in savings-bank amounting to something over three hundred dollars. Stella is not exactly an object of charity."

The storekeeper was quite aware of this fact, as was everybody else in the village. The will had been drawn up by the local lawyer, who had deemed it necessary to keep his counsel no longer than till the funeral was over. However, Stella's friends did not think the legacy of great importance, as bearing on the question in hand. Three hundred dollars was a nice little nest-egg for her, to be sure; but it would not cover her board, clothing and school expenses for two years.

He simply bowed, therefore, and took up his hat as he replied, civilly:

"Certainly, certainly, ma'am; take

all the time you wish to talk the matter over with the young lady. When you and she have made up your minds, may I ask that you will communicate with me? "

At Miss Sophia's front door, the merchant encountered Doctor Brown. Almost a personal encounter it was, for the big Doctor was in a hurry, as usual, and had stopped in upon urgent business, on his way to a patient. Miss Sophia was just on the point of escaping to her room, to consider this unprecedented interference with her plans — rank impertinence, she was inclined to call it — when he bluntly detained her.

" No, no; I can't sit down. I sha'n't keep you a minute. It's just this. Stella Waring must have her chance. She must graduate from the academy, in the first place, and her little bit of money won't do the trick. My wife and I aren't rich,

as you know, but there's room under our roof for the child, especially if she's willing to make herself useful — and I know she is, bless her heart!

"She can come to-morrow; we need her to wait on mother, help my wife about the house and be company for Doris, so she'll give as much as she gets. Stella's proud, Miss Sophia, and wouldn't consent to be a burden to anybody. I want her to understand that she'll be doing us a favor by coming. Talk it over with her, and let me know. Good day!"

Well, there was no way out of it; the whole matter must be laid before the girl herself. Distasteful as the task was, Miss Sophia must explain to her both offers and give her her choice; yes, and the further alternative of remaining where she was for two years longer. Upon mature consideration, and with her eyes

fully opened, at last, to Stella's position and value in the community, this stiff-necked elderly Puritan was compelled to face the fact that the girl's services were worth as much to her as to any one else; and the further fact that it would not "look well," in the eyes of her lifelong neighbors and townsfolk, if her dead sister's foster-child should be obliged to find another home in Laurel. She could scarcely be packed off to the reservation willy-nilly; not with such influential friends on her side.

Besides, it would be *some* satisfaction to get the better of that scheming Mr. Parker. Let him take his own medicine, and see how he liked it. And besides, when you really came down to it, what would she, Miss Sophia, do without her light-handed and swift-footed little attendant? Poor Lucy was gone, and Stella was the only one, now, who knew

all their ways. Must she be at the mercy of a Mrs. Maloney in her old age? So for hours she sat and thought till her old head fairly spun, and the subject was broached to a subdued and red-eyed Stella that very evening.

"Oh, Jibby darling! to think of your really and truly coming to live with us! Oh, isn't Daddy the very nicest man that ever lived? He never refused me anything; not if I had set my heart on it, you know. And I told him that if you didn't graduate, then I wouldn't, either; and the very day I was eighteen I was going out to Dakota to join you on your own land, and run that ranch we always talked about. He only said: 'Tut, tut, daughter; we'll do better than that.'

"And even mother's glad, because I do bother her sometimes when she has a headache, and now she can play bridge

all day, if she likes. You and me'll see to everything, won't we, Jibby? You *are* coming, aren't you, darling dear? "

Thus Cynthia in one breath, flinging herself upon her friend's neck the next morning, in the prim garden of the old Spellman homestead, among the old-fashioned posies, day-lilies and bleeding-heart and wonderful rose-hued peonies, while Scotty, with the demonstrative jealousy of his kind, stood upon his gaunt hind legs and thrust his cold nose between the loving pair.

Doris, prettier than ever in all the dignity of her ankle-long skirts and " Psyche knot " of honey-colored hair, noted Stella's hesitating silence and cannily began, feeling her way:

" You know, Jibby, Grandma is getting old and feeble, and she does like you better'n 'most any one. She won't let even me do for her as she will you, Stella

Waring! I don't see how you manage to bewitch everybody the way you do.

"Uncle Si says, dummed if he wouldn't like nothing better than for you to come out there and be his little housekeeper. Think of that! He never forgot that breakfast you got for him the day Cynthia was chased by the bull; and he says that for nobody else in this endurin' world would he have hitched up the critters long after bed-time of a wet night. I don't know when he's been out after eight o'clock 'cept that night he took you home. Well, aren't you ever going to speak? We *all* want you, Stella; now which is it going to be?"

Yellow Star faced her two friends with almost a tragic gesture of out-flung arms, and the rare tears in her soft, black eyes.

"Darlings," she cried, "you are all too sweet for anything, and I shall never forget it as long as I live. To think that

I have such friends! But do you know, the most wonderful part of it all is, *Miss Sophia wants me too!*

"She's getting old, you see, and she isn't used to doing for herself, and she really does need me, girls. Don't look like that, Cynthia; she's my dear, dear Mother Waring's only sister — the only near kin she had in this world — so she used to say. Girls, I know I should be perfectly happy with either of you, but I can't leave Miss Sophia — she's *folks*. I know I can take care of her, and here is where I *belong*."

And, of course, that settled it.

CHAPTER XII

HERBS AND SIMPLES

MISS SOPHIA, notwithstanding the unexpected turn that affairs had taken, had by no means relinquished her point of view. No sooner was she satisfied that Stella would not desert her post for any other offer, however flattering, than she recovered herself sufficiently to make quite clear to the girl her changed footing in the Spellman household.

"Our work is light," she announced, coldly, "and I shall expect you to earn your board. I have no doubt you prefer to be independent, as far as possible. I will pay such bills as are necessary, but there must be no more extras nor nonsense, mind. As for clothes, you'll

scarcely outgrow them now, and my sister kept you so generously supplied that I should not think you would need anything new for a long time. A girl in your position must not expect to dress as well as a prosperous man like Mr. Parker or Dr. Brown can afford to dress *his* daughter."

Yellow Star said nothing, but she was not slow to take a hint, and she made up her mind then and there never to ask Miss Sophia for a dollar or a new dress. Neither did she want to draw any of her precious money out of the savings-bank where Mother Waring had placed it for her, on their first coming to Laurel.

She was quick and capable; all the housework for two, except laundry and heavy cleaning, now fell to her share, and took up nearly all her time, out of school. However, there was the long summer vacation to plan for; and in the spring

after Mrs. Waring's death, Stella began to seek and to find opportunities for earning small sums of money. She delivered hats for the local milliner and gowns for the village dressmaker. She took a neighbor's baby out in his carriage on fine days, at ten cents an errand or an airing. One April afternoon, Doctor Brown found her on her knees with basket and trowel, grubbing up dandelions in Miss Sophia's front yard.

"She pays me a cent apiece, because she doesn't like to see them in her grass," Stella explained, gravely. Miss Sophia had at least a sense of justice, and although she exacted full service of the orphan, to the utmost equivalent of her modest living, she would not ask her to do out-of-door work without paying for it. She had been going to hire a boy for the dandelions, and Stella had begged for the chance.

"Why, my child, you'll soon be a Crœsus at that rate," laughed the good Doctor.

"I really need the money for a new dress," pursued Stella, who was thoroughly in earnest. "Miss Frost, the dressmaker, would like to have me help her in my spare time; I can make good buttonholes, and she'll pay me thirty cents a dozen. But I would so much rather do something out-of-doors. You see, I am indoors nearly all the time, with my books and the housework, and I'm *starving* for some fresh air."

"Ahem!" The Doctor cleared his throat and took the matter under consideration. He would have dearly liked to put his big, generous hand in his pocket and buy the new dress, but he was half afraid the child wouldn't take it — or, even if she would, how about that dawning sense of personal independence?

No, no! let her earn the dress, especially since she was wisely choosing the open-air tasks that should soon restore its color and roundness to the eager, appealing young face.

"Sensible girl!" he approved. "Do you know, Stella, those dandelion roots you are digging have medicinal value? The wholesale drug-stores will pay you a few cents a pound for them, when they're properly washed and dried. There's burdock, too, and tansy, and — let me see — wild mustard and boneset, beside several more. You must gather the seed-pods of the mustard, and the leaves and tops of boneset and tansy. They're all worth money; and all as common as dirt hereabouts. The farmers ought to pay you, too, for helping to get rid of them; almost every one I've named is a troublesome pest."

"Oh, Doctor Brown! How perfectly

splendid!" Stella clasped her long, brown hands eagerly, still kneeling on the soft turf, and once more the dull glow crept up in her quiet cheek. "I know them all now except the tansy, and you'll show me that, won't you? And tell me just where to take them. It will be exactly what my own mother and her mother must have done many a time — digging roots and herbs for medicine. There's nothing else in the whole world I should like so much."

"Yes, it was I set her up in business, and a fair sort of business it's turning out," chuckled the Doctor some three months later, from the depths of his shabby easy chair. "Not a fortune in it, of course; but she makes seventy-five cents or a dollar many days, with Cynthia's help. Why aren't you out with them, Doris? Afraid of a freckle or two

my girl? Well, health is beauty, and their long days in the sun and air, close to the life-giving earth, will be worth more than a fortune to them."

Doris tossed her pretty head, from her favorite perch in the broad window-seat, where she was putting careful stitches in the daintiest of shirt waists.

"The hot sun and the stooping over give me a headache," she complained. She loved Jibby as much as ever, of course, but the sacrifice of that apple-blossom complexion to the Sun-God was too much to expect.

"When I was a girl," her mother observed, "I used to be told that it made a young girl coarse and blowsy to expose her skin to the wind and sun. Why, I never thought of going out in summer without shade-hat, gloves and a veil; and nowadays the girls won't wear any one of them."

"I d' know what the present generation's comin' to," agreed Grandpa Brown, discontentedly. "This new-fangled idee of livin' outdoors is suthin' I don't take no stock in, fer one. Houses was made to be lived in, says I; more specially for the wimmen folks. It used to be thought ondecent to sleep aout; an' if folks had sot a table in the back yard for comp'ny, you'd of said they'd gone plump crazy. I dunno whether 'twas Stella set the fashion, or mebbe that school-teacher from up-state that was always gassin' 'bout 'fresh-air;' but anyhow, Laurel's got the disease, an' got it bad."

"When him an' me went to housekeepin'," chimed in Grandma, briskly, "folks nailed all the winders down hard an' fast before 'Lection day, an' never took the nails out till spring cleanin'. We didn't hold with warmin' all outdoors, like they 'pear to nowadays.

Considerin' them nailed-up winders, an' the things we ate an' drunk, an' the germs we hadn't never heard of, I've never rightly onderstood, Ezry, how you 'count for Grampa an' me bein' as peart as we be, an' both on us goin' on for seventy-seven."

"Speakin' of vittles, I ain't never felt the same sence they took away my pie for breakfust," grumbled Grandpa, and everybody laughed.

Doctor Brown lit his pipe and retired behind the newspaper, but found himself thinking less about State politics and the rise in certain stocks than about the new idea that his father had unwittingly let fall. Yes, there was no doubt about it; it was his little favorite and Miss Morrison, between them, who had boldly thrown open the windows and waked up the sleepy children in stuffy schoolrooms, who had set the fashion of long

cross-country walks among the younger set, had revived toboggan parties and skeeing and "one-day camps," who had, in short, conducted an effective "anti-tuberculosis campaign" under the disguise of "fun." He had not realized before how much they were all indebted to that natural hunger for fresh air, so naïvely confessed by his "outdoor girl."

"Though it *is* bad for my business — and the undertaker's," he humorously admitted to himself.

On that same midsummer day, Stella herself, with loyal Cynthia at her side and Scotty acting alternately as scout and rear-guard, was harvesting a field yellow with feathery wild mustard, down at "Uncle Si's place." That eccentric bachelor had offered to pay handsomely for the extermination of the weed by gathering its seed, and this bounty, to-

gether with the market price of five cents a pound, had spurred the girls to unusual exertions.

The work *was* hard, and they had been at it steadily for two or three hours, when, with shoulders that ached from stooping and faces glowing with heat, they straightened up at last, and looked longingly over toward the cool shade of Wolcott's Woods.

"Let's get a drink at the spring, and then sit under that tree awhile and rest," begged Cynthia. "I've got some sandwiches and a splendid book in my pocket."

"Well," consented Stella, "I suppose we might. You've helped like a Trojan, Sin, and I 'most know I'm going to have money enough for my new fall suit. I don't want to disgrace our class, you know," she added, merrily.

But long before they reached the giant

maple that cast its green shade over a far corner of the field, Sir Walter began to bark wildly, and to make excited little dashes forward and runs backward, after his usual idiotic fashion when trouble was in the wind.

"What *do* you suppose is the matter with him, Jibby?" Sin demanded.

Stella gave a long, searching look ahead and calmly answered:

"There's a man lying down under that tree."

"A man! Oh, Jibby! what shall we do? Hadn't we better run home as fast as we can?"

"Let's go a little nearer and see who it is, first," suggested the other, suiting the action to the word.

"It's a tramp, or somebody dreadful, I know," Sin declared, but she would not desert her friend, and both girls, escorted by the cringing Sir Walter, drew near to

the prone figure of a poorly dressed, black-bearded man, whose hat, stick and bundle lay at his side.

"How perfectly horrid he looks!" Cynthia shuddered under her breath. "It's a tramp or a nasty peddler, and he's either drunk or asleep. For goodness' sake, Stella, don't go any nearer!"

"He looks sick to me . . . and hungry . . . and out of work," her friend pitifully declared. "Perhaps he hasn't any place to go. He can't hurt us, and Scotty would protect us, anyway. (Down, sir!) Get some water, quick, Cynthia! he's had a sunstroke or something," and she bent over the "horrid man" and loosened his coarse shirt at the neck, moistened the livid face with the tin cup of cold water that Cynthia hastened to fetch, and fanned him with her broad-brimmed hat.

When in a few minutes he came to

himself, he was barely able to speak, and that in a broken sort of lingo that the girls could make little of, but dog-like gratitude looked out of the lusterless black eyes. Stella's strong young arms helped to raise him to a more comfortable position, and Cynthia knelt down and eagerly fed him bits of bread-and-butter from her lunch-box.

"Go to Uncle Si, please!" directed Stella. "He will know what we ought to do. I shall stay here, with Sir Walter to take care of me, till you come back."

But it was while she was still patiently fanning the stranger and trying to piece out a meaning from his foreign looks and words, that Stella was attracted by fresh activity on the part of the dog, who had lain apparently asleep at her feet. She looked up, and saw a tall, lightly built young man coming rapidly toward her, his serious face breaking

into smiles as he noticed her start of pleased surprise.

"Why, Ethan! is it really you? Where did you come from?" she cried, springing to her feet, but quite forgetting to hold out her hand. The Sioux are not demonstrative in the matter of greetings.

Ethan, however, did not hesitate to take prompt possession of the little brown hand and press it warmly for a minute, as he looked into the soft, child-like eyes which met his with the old simplicity.

"Gad, but she's a winner! Just about twice as handsome and ten times as magnetic as she promised to be, two years ago," thought the boy, but he only said:

"Oh, I just ran down for a few days to see Uncle Si and all the folks! College opens in three weeks, you know — my last year. Uncle and I were busy talking over old times and the prospects of the

crops, and the convivial moment had just arrived with the buttermilk, when Cynthia appeared, all out of breath, and from her story I judged I'd better come and look after you without loss of time.

"So this is your tramp, eh? The poor chap looks harmless enough, to be sure, but for all that it was a risky thing to do, for a girl. I suppose you 'wanted to help' like that time I had to fetch you home at ten o'clock at night from Buffalo Bill's Wild West — do you remember?"

The girl's rich color deepened a trifle under his openly admiring eyes, as he added, pleasantly:

"He's better now, thanks to the little Samaritan; a green Polander out of a job, I should say at a guess. Suppose I toll him over to Uncle Si's place and try to persuade the old fellow that he wants an extra hand?

"But if you often get into such scrapes, I don't see how you could keep it up very long without me to help you out, Stella."

CHAPTER XIII

INDIAN HOSPITALITY

AMONG the hoarded possessions of gentle " Mother Waring " which fell to her little girl, was a large and varied collection of Indian photographs. Stella had often turned them over and over, with almost painful interest; she did so once again; and after choosing with great care a single one, laid all the rest away.

The picture that now stood conspicuously on her old-fashioned bureau was a large one taken in Washington many years earlier. It showed a group of three strong faces belonging to leading men of the Sioux in the middle of the nineteenth century — the last, indeed, of their tribal leaders, trained in native ways.

"I don't think that's a very pretty picture," remarked Cynthia, carelessly, one day when the three friends had gathered in Stella's little chamber up under the eaves. "Why didn't you pick out that one in the beaded shirt and eagle-feather war-bonnet down to his heels?"

"I liked the cunning little baby in its mother's arms," Doris suggested.

"Or that perfectly splendid young Indian man who's in college somewhere, going to be a minister," persisted Sin. "Seems to me these old Indians in long hair and plain clothes are rather a hard-looking crowd," she added.

It was often difficult for Stella to explain herself. She was silent now, but her cheeks took on the dark flush they wore when she was deeply moved. Cynthia saw it, and hastened to add:

"After all, though, there's something

pretty *fine* about them. That one in the middle, now; isn't he sort of solid and hard and grand, like a big, gray boulder — or — or a charging buffalo?"

"I like to look at them every day," murmured Stella, at last, with a grateful glance. Cynthia always understood; perhaps not just at first, but in time she was sure to understand. "You see, girls, those were real *men;* strong and just, faithful and truth-speaking. They were men who talked little and did much. We younger Indians who float along like chips on the current need to keep before our eyes the old strength of our race. Those faces seem to me carved, as you say, just like out of solid rock."

A day or two later, a little knot of academy girls were all trying to talk at once, in excited voices of which only snatches could be heard.

"I shouldn't think she'd want to push herself in where she isn't wanted. . . ."

"Nobody'll speak to her if she does come."

"Just as if our crowd cared to associate with shop-girls and — "

Apparently it was all an affair of the social club with the mysterious initials, which had held regular meetings since their sophomore year. It was a club that took pleasure in being exclusive, and had little regard for the point of view of the excluded. How foolish it was of them to feel sore or resentful! Rosey Bernstein, undoubtedly a star pupil, was vulgarly witty at the expense of the club and its unimportant secrets and foolish little mysteries.

There had never been any question about Stella's membership — Stella whom she and two or three others had been inclined to persecute in the early days,

but had given it up when they found to their surprise that the word "Indian" was held a title of honor, rather than a term of reproach. In scholarship they were neck and neck; but what won Rosey completely was the Indian girl's unaffected admiration of the fat Bernstein baby, of whom the whole family was inordinately proud. Babies were Stella's weak point, anyway.

But we are losing sight of our conversation, which concerned, not Rosey or Mary Maloney, but a little girl who had been obliged to drop out of her class in their Senior year, and go to work in the factory to help support a large family.

Poor Milly was so slight, so shy, so unpretending, that it did seem as if she might have been allowed to slip in without remark among her more fortunate classmates, on the Saturday half-holiday. It was soon settled, however, that she was

" not their kind at all," that it had been all a mistake having her in the first place, and she must be made to feel that now she had left school she ought *of course* to resign from the Club. There being no dissent from this proposition, the girls were about to take up the programme for their next meeting, when a clear young voice with the least bit of foreign accent suddenly broke in upon the talk.

" Girls, I've been reading in an old book how the New England Indians made the first white men welcome and gave them the best they had, and how the poor exiles here and in Virginia would have starved many times if it hadn't been for the Indians' corn. I wondered, just at first, why they did it, because the strangers were so different, and you know we don't usually like people who are a different color or race or even dress or live differently. And then I remembered

that we Indians are always taught to be kind to strangers — to feed even our enemies if they come to us hungry or in trouble — what you call *hospitality*. The Christian white people don't teach their children hospitality, do they? "

There was a minute's surprised silence.

" After all, girls, it won't hurt us a bit to let Milly come whenever she can; prob'ly it won't be very often," hesitated Doris.

" Have any of you seen her lately? " Cynthia broke in. " She was always little, you know, but now! Why, there's nothing to her at all. She looks just as neat and nice as ever, but oh my! Just as if she didn't get enough to eat. Her father doesn't work regularly, you know; and her mother was in the hospital six months; Milly earns three dollars a week and has to work from seven in the morning until six at night, except Saturday after-

noons and Sundays. I asked her why she hadn't been to Sunday-school lately, and she said she spent all day Sunday washing and ironing her clothes, because she was so tired she simply couldn't do it evenings; but I think it was partly because she dreaded meeting the girls she used to go with."

Here Doris began to cry quietly, and the other girls, who were really good-hearted enough at bottom, looked so ashamed of themselves that Stella slipped away as soon as she could.

"There's one thing more I must speak about, girls," she said, as soon as the three inseparables were out of hearing. "You know I haven't taken my turn at entertaining the Club — and this is our third year — and each of you has had them at your house two or three times. I've been thinking and thinking."

"Oh, don't, Jibby darling!" cried

Doris, distressed. "Nobody *expects* you to entertain; we all understand."

"Everybody in Laurel knows *Miss Sophia*," declared Cynthia, with bitter emphasis.

"I can't help it; I *must* do something for the others, just once! No, I can't ask Miss Sophia to have them at her house, even if I buy all the refreshments with my own money. She is very particular about her floors — and the dishes — a cup might get broken or something. But oh, Doris! *do* you suppose Uncle Si — ?"

"Why, of course! why didn't we think of it before? A picnic in Wolcott's Woods; why, it would be just *scrumptious!*" interrupted Doris, while irrepressible Sin seized an arm of each and whirled them round and round till all were laughing and out of breath.

"How about a week from Saturday?"

"It's nearly always fine, this time of year." "How will you get us all out there?" "What shall you have to eat, Jibby?" Poor Stella was fairly buried under the rush of eager questions and exclamations.

When the great day came at last, a perfect afternoon in late September, Uncle Si's springless farm wagon, cushioned with golden oat straw and drawn by a pair of sleek, black horses, rumbled merrily from door to door through the village, taking in some fifteen happy passengers. The first surprise came when it was found that not only shrinking little Milly, but every girl in the class was of the party. It had been Stella's shy request to have the "undesirables" as her personal guests for the day, and that innocent little remark about "Christian white people" had somehow made it uncom-

fortable to refuse. The "B. N.'s" had yet to discover how much more satisfaction there is in getting people in than in merely keeping them out.

The democratic "straw ride," a revival of an all but forgotten fashion, took exceedingly well, and it was a well-shaken-together crowd that tumbled out at Uncle's "spring house," where delicious, ice-cold buttermilk, sweet milk, or pure spring water was served to everybody. Of course, the girls' throats were dry from much singing and shouting, so that nothing could have been better.

The next stop was at the big hay-barn, where all were invited to hunt for eggs in the clean, sweet-smelling mows. This was great fun; and when the eggs proved to be hard-boiled, the plan of this progressive picnic began to declare itself.

At the kitchen door, which stood invitingly open, stood a beaming neighbor

woman with a bucket of steaming coffee and a basket of fried chickens, done to a turn, and these were quickly conveyed to the near-by apple orchard, where a few boards and sawhorses had been converted into a rustic table, fancifully decorated with ferns and autumn leaves in Cynthia's original style.

But the nicest surprise of all was a blazing bonfire at a convenient distance, with — yes, it was actually Ethan, attired as an Indian brave and lavishly feathered, bending dutifully over it, flanked by a mammoth heap of late roasting ears.

After the substantials had been consumed, somebody offered a prize for the biggest apple, which was easily won by Cynthia, the best climber and biggest tom-boy in the crowd. Meanwhile, a huge, frosted cake had appeared upon the table, Doris' mother's contribution to

the feast, and Ethan slyly suggested that treasure was sometimes found in woodpeckers' nests, which led to another joyous scramble, and the discovery of handfuls of pop-corn balls and Shaker sweetmeats in tempting hollows of the old apple-trees.

By-and-by the whole company gathered in a circle around the dying bonfire, and Cynthia, with apparent unpremeditation, proposed an hour of story-telling.

Doris set the ball rolling with the very old tale of the Ash and the Elm, the father and mother of mankind, as told by the Abenakis, the Indians of New England. Both trees grew in Uncle's door-yard; and her hearers, looking up, seemed to realize for the first time the graceful femininity of the drooping elm, and the sturdiness of the more robust and straight-limbed ash-tree.

" There was once a chief who had three

daughters," began Rosey, promptly, "and the youngest daughter was much the prettiest, so that all the young men wanted to marry her. After all, she married the Turtle, who was very lazy, and lounged about the camp-fire while the others fished and hunted. They all hated him because he had won the handsomest girl in the village, and yet did nothing to keep her. One day, they caught him out of sight of home, and at once told him that they had decided to build a big fire, and roast him alive.

"'Ah, that is what I like!' boasted the Turtle. 'You can't get it too warm to suit me.'

"Then some one suggested that they had better drown him instead, and the Turtle appeared to be much worried. He cried and begged for mercy, but they seized hold of him in spite of his struggles, and threw him into the lake near by.

"'Ha, ha! now I am at home!' exclaimed the Turtle, and he dived down into the cool water and left them all gaping and angrier than ever."

After everybody had laughed at the expense of the disappointed suitors, Cynthia began the story of Lox, the mischief-maker, who one day uprooted a wild plum-tree and set it on his head, so that he scattered ripe fruit as he walked.

"Pretty soon," related Sin, "he met two fun-loving girls, who begged that they too might be allowed to wear such charming and surprising head-dresses.

"So Lox planted on each of their heads a small plum-tree, by his magic power fastening the roots firmly in their long black hair. The girls went home very proud and pleased, and soon found themselves the talk of the village.

"After a while they grew tired of being pointed at, as well as of carrying the

plum-trees on their heads, and each tried to pull the other's tree out by the roots. They pulled and pulled with all their might, and at last they got them out; but, because all their beautiful hair was pulled out too, the girls cried bitterly, and wished they had not been so foolish."

So it went all round the ring; and when it came the turn of their hostess, she could scarcely speak for surprise and pleasure in the pretty compliment to her well-loved people. After she had capped the climax with one of her best Dakota tales,[1] they were all delighted to hear the sound of a rustic, rollicking dance-tune played on the old fiddle by Uncle Si himself, who had certainly entered into the spirit of the occasion with all the zest of a boy.

Uncle was sitting out on the side porch

[1] *For the story told by Stella, see "Wigwam Evenings," by Charles A. and Elaine G. Eastman.*

in his shirt-sleeves, and there was a nice, level stretch of turf inviting to the dance. Tune followed tune until everybody was out of breath, and the frolic ended with a weird, make-believe " Ghost Dance," and a most realistic scalp-dance, in which the girls held at arms' length one another's fallen tresses, while going through steps and figures that would certainly have put an Indian brave to the blush.

The sun was getting low when the straw-lined Cinderella's coach, driven by Ethan this time, drew up at the farmhouse porch for its happy freight of tired girls. It really did seem as if the class of 19— had never known each other so well before, never felt so close to the soil and so pleasantly alive to the spirits of the past, as after they had shared the hospitality of the Indian girl and her bighearted Uncle Si.

CHAPTER XIV

AN END AND A BEGINNING

THE three "Clover Leaves" will never, never forget their last year at the little old academy. The square, white tower with its peremptory, sweet-toned bell that dominated their waking hours and all but ruled their dreams; the arm-in-arm saunter from school through autumn's mellow haze, or gay exchange of greetings on the crisp winter air; the stiff portions of Latin and French and mathematics sweetened with girlish mirth and nonsense; the Senior dance and the Senior play and all the new-made dignities of that momentous year — these still haunt the charmed halls of memory, among the sweetest ghosts of life's phantom past.

And with it all, with all the modest ambitions and the innocent vanities, there was mingled many a longing or an anxious thought of "what next" — of the real problems that lay beyond that mysterious closed door.

For most of the boys the next thing was work — just plain, every-day work on the farm or in the shop; for a few, both boys and girls, it was college or normal, and then school-teaching or another profession. Doris and her mother had no thought but of the dear home duties and the small social triumphs that beckoned so plainly, when the pretty, only daughter should have "finished her education." But Cynthia and Stella were of a different mold, and they passed many a happy hour in sharing their confidences and their dreams, which ranged all the way from that ranch in Dakota on Stella's allotment, which they

were to run together, riding their own range triumphantly in the approved cow-girl fashion, to the glorious vision of Stella as a famous doctor and Cynthia as a great artist.

The modest business in herbs and simples had led its votary to pursue her botany a little further, and make a special study of medicinal plants. She was often discovered hidden away in a corner of Doctor Brown's office, eagerly comparing "Gray" with the "Materia Medica;" and she found, too, that Grandma Brown was more than ready to impart the neglected virtues of mullein and catnip, dock and sassafras, some of which Stella tested by personal experiment, while the girls began teasingly to call her the "Yarb-Doctor."

Doctor Brown secretly believed nothing beyond the capacity of his favorite, but he conscientiously meant not to

encourage ambitions that it might be impossible to realize.

"Those hands of Stella's," he impulsively remarked one day, when her future was under discussion, letting his sage eyes rest meditatively upon the long, supple, sensitive members — "well, they do say such hands can only belong to a doctor or a musician."

"Or a mother," unexpectedly murmured his wife.

He gave her a quick, approving look, and again the warm blood glowed in the Indian girl's dark cheek. She suddenly remembered how Ethan had been telling her of his plans to study medicine the next year, and how she had listened with all her heart in her face, and at last cried out without thinking:

"Oh, I wish, *how* I wish I could be a doctor, too!"

She remembered vividly the peculiar

look in his eyes as he gently answered:

"I could wish it too — unless — unless you were meant for something even better, Stella."

And she had not understood at all.

Before the March sun began to melt the snow-drifts, Stella's friends got together privately and laid their plans to present her with her Commencement Day outfit. She had worn all winter the trim suit and modest hat purchased with her summer's work in the fields, after the rows of drying shelves in Miss Sophia's garret had been cleared of their aromatic burden. And oddly charming she looked in them — like a symphony in browns, with her gleaming agate skin and the intense black of hair and eyes for contrast. But the "weed money" was all gone, and there was no time for extra

earning that last, busy year. Surely she could not be so wickedly proud as to reject an offering of true love.

Mr. Parker insisted upon purchasing the dress — a duplicate of Cynthia's. It was fine handkerchief linen, and Mrs. Brown, who made all Doris' clothes, would make it up simply and beautifully, while Doris devoted all her spare minutes for weeks to certain individual touches of hand embroidery. Cynthia recklessly squandered a whole month's pocket-money on the long, white suede gloves, and Grandma Brown unearthed from among her girlhood's treasures a sandal-wood fan of delicious memory.

Doctor Brown brought home one day a small watch cased in gun-metal with Stella's name on it, and Miss Morrison, who had gone back to the city to teach, sent a long, curiously wrought gun-metal chain.

But the most surprising contributions came from Uncle Si Wolcott and Miss Sophia. Uncle Si actually "hitched up" and drove to Westwood for the finest pair of bronze slippers and bronze silk stockings to be bought with money. Miss Sophia had tatted a handkerchief, but being impressed at the last minute with the apparent meanness of her offering as compared with the others, she unlocked a certain bureau drawer and took from it a quaint comb of carved ivory, fetched home from China by a seafaring ancestor, which gave the crowning touch to Stella's strange beauty, set in the swirling masses of her blue-black hair.

The girl laughed and cried when she saw them, forgetting for once all her Indian stoicism, and stroked the lovely frock with reverent fingers, saying softly:

"Do you know, dears, I can *love* these clothes!"

There was one more gift, that came by mail on the very day of fate itself. It was a box just long enough to hold the diploma, the sandal-wood fan, the ivory comb, and any treasures worthy a place with these. It was cunningly made by hand out of fragrant, warm-hearted cedar-wood, fitted with a tiny lock and key, and decorated with a knife in conventionalized designs, chief of which was the recurring device of a five-pointed star. Doris and Cynthia were the only ones privileged to admire Ethan's gift.

Next to the bride in the affections of rural New England stands the fair girl graduate, and that June day in Laurel was apparently quite given over to the triumphant parade of simple-hearted youth. In many a modest home, solici-

tous mothers were robing and adorning their daughters as if for the altar itself, and that evening in the town hall it seemed as if every soul in the village, old and young, rich and poor, must be pressing into a seat or peering curiously in at open door or window.

And now the orchestra struck up and the platform began to fill—that platform fluttering with banners and banked with the dark-green, glossy leaves and rosy chalices of the mountain laurel that gave the village its name. Pete Holley, a strapping youth of color, and star of the football team, took his place with dignity. Mary Maloney, the washerwoman's daughter, more elaborately dressed than most, sat happily in the front row next to demure Doris, whose piano solo made a pleasing variation in the programme.

Stella, too, had a "part"—she and

Rosey Bernstein led their class; and those who saw her on that day of days will long remember the tall, swaying figure, the gliding step, the vivid, dark face with its touch of foreign distinction among the rosy village girls, and most of all the tender, rhythmic tones that rang so true in her touching farewell to school days and to the comrades of that golden time.

For Yellow Star had made her difficult decision — to go back to her own people and do for them what she could. There had come, in the early spring, a cry for help — another dingy scrawl in scarce legible Dakota from the Indian camp on Cherry Creek. Blue Earth had a "bad heart;" her husband, Young Eagle, had left her and gone across the Big Water with the show; she had a baby girl now, and the boy was five years old. She wanted them to "walk the white man's road," and she wanted The-One-who-was-

left-Alive to come and live with her, and teach her how to teach her children. There were many women in the camp, she said, who needed such help.

After a sleepless night with the letter under her pillow, the girl had shown it to her friends and asked their advice. In her heart, she knew that there was only one answer possible, and they read her decision in her face. Of course, Doris and Cynthia cried a little, and squeezed her hands, and begged her "not to give up her plans, darling;" while Miss Sophia held her peace with remarkable consistency and success. But Doctor Brown promptly hunted up Mr. Parker, and the two had an important conference.

"I can see she means to go, and it may be the best thing to do, for a time, at any rate," the Doctor admitted, gruffly. "But there's just one thing about it; that girl is not going into an Indian camp without

position or backing. She's too handsome, for one thing; and too young and trusting altogether. Young as she is, Stella is competent to fill a good place in the Government Indian Service, and that she must have!"

"I've been telling my wife I'd like nothing better than to send the girl through college, if she wants to go," demurred Mr. Parker. "I think she could persuade my girl to go with her — there or anywhere! Say, Doc! are you dead sure she ought to butt in amongst a lot of half-savage Sioux — a girl who would make a place for herself in any community?"

"I don't know much about the American Indian, but judging from our Stella, there must be good stuff in the breed," answered the Doctor, stanchly. "She'd make a magnificent nurse — doctor, perhaps; but she's too young to begin

training yet awhile. Better let her try it out west for a year or two; she will, anyway; she's made up her mind, and you know what that means. What I came over to ask you is have you any wires to pull that'll land our little girl in the Indian Service? What? "

"Sure," assented Mr. Parker, heartily. "There's Senator Morton; he'll do anything for me — within reason, of course. We'll fix it up in no time."

When Stella herself was cautiously consulted, a fortnight later, she declared that she did not know enough to teach and would rather not take a school position. She wanted to live right in the camp, she said, close to the people; to help the poor, ignorant women and children, like Blue Earth and her babies.

"Then you want to be a field matron," pronounced the Doctor, who had been studying the subject. "Six hundred a

year and the right to draw on the agency for supplies — soap and buckets and rations for sick people and all that. The work just what you would be doing anyway, and the whole United States Government back of you. That's the talk."

And so it came about that our eighteen-year-old Indian girl delivered her valedictory with her appointment as field matron at Cherry Creek pinned inside her white frock, right over the loving heart that beat high with the hope of service.

CHAPTER XV

THE SCENE SHIFTS

CHERRY CREEK is one of those erratic streams that flow eastward into the brown Missouri across the billowing plains — now a mere wavy line of timber fringing a dry ravine; again an angry yellow flood that drowns box-elder and wild cherry and washes the feet of the slim young cottonwoods.

The sun-brimmed solitude of a September day enfolded the two girls, Blue Earth and Yellow Star — for, although mother of a five-year-old boy, the deserted wife of Young Eagle was in reality not so much older than her friend — as they happily gathered red-and-yellow Dakota plums in the rustling thickets away up the creek. The young mother

was quaintly robed in a loose, wide-sleeved "Dakota gown" of Turkey red calico, while the young maid was more trimly clad in one of the plain, indigo-blue prints that she had last worn in Miss Sophia's kitchen. Only the freedom of the new life was symbolized and expressed by sleeves rolled over the dimpled, brown elbows, uncovered, glossy head, and soft, richly embroidered moccasins on the slender feet.

The honey-sweet plums, a peck or more, had been harvested in a wide-mouthed cotton sack. "Let me carry it — you have the baby!" cried Yellow Star, gayly tossing the sack over one shoulder, while the other picked up a placid bundle rolled in a patchwork quilt from under the wild plum tree, and with much maternal cooing and chattering proceeded to secure it on her back, in the folds of the bright shawl she wore.



"I was only digging medicine," the elf soberly announced.
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"Chas-kay! Chas-ka-a-ay! Where is the little rascal?" she scolded, good-humoredly; and Yellow Star took up the musical call and sent it ringing through the ravines. In a minute or so, there came obediently stumbling up the slippery bank a queer little nondescript figure, attired in nothing but a green calico shirt and a pair of tiny moccasins, its two tight braids of black hair tied up with red flannel, and the round face of a shining cinnamon brown set with two black gems, in the shape of a pair of sparkling, mischievous eyes.

"I was only digging medicine," the elf soberly announced; "good medicine for The-One-who-was-left-Alive!" He held up a long, straggling root, and looked so irresistibly important that both girls burst into peals of tuneful laughter.

"We'll take it to show Grandmother," declared the one so favored, whose

botanical studies had already suggested to her to penetrate, if possible, the mysteries of the Dakota herbalist. She seized his little, earth-stained hand and all three set out for the camp — a huddle of log cabins, looking for all the world like the "cob houses" of children, interspersed with an occasional brush arbor or rude corral, and with many of the white, conical teepees of the Sioux.

Glimpsed in the distance, under a sky quivering with heat and against a wide background of sunburnt grass, the whole looked more like a toy village than anything real and serious, at all events to the new-comer, who, with all her earnestness of purpose, had fallen to some degree under the spell of that colorful, elemental existence.

The zest of the open spaces and the free winds, the absence of clocks and bells

and whistles and other insistent reminders and regulators of our time-slavery, the fascinating simplicity and friendliness of the dark-faced, smiling people — *her* people — in their easy, picturesque garb, all these had seemed so restful, so almost intoxicating, after the set tasks of many well-ordered years.

When they reached camp and threw down their burdens under the shade of a large arbor of boughs, where an old woman with gray witch-locks flying loose and a skin like dark-brown parchment looked up from her eternal moccasin-mending, and a long-haired dog not much bigger than a rat flew to greet them with all but articulate cries of joy — then, indeed, they were at home!

"Sh-h-h-Sheka!" Blue Earth was tired and hungry, and drove off the dog with a rush of angry sibilants.

"Here, Sheka, Sheka! Poor little thing," coaxed Yellow Star, pitifully.

"How many did you get?" demanded Grandmother, reaching greedily for the sack. "The Blue-Coat has been here with a paper; I think it is from the Little Father. I gave him coffee and bread, and he told me all the news. Here is the paper," and she drew it from her wide sleeve and held it toward the girl.

Yellow Star took the agent's letter and glanced it over as she stood, while the others, Chaskay and Sheka included, gazed steadily into her thoughtful face with frank curiosity.

"It is only to say that the sewing-machines will not be here until next month. I sha'n't wait for them; the women are coming to-morrow, and there's plenty of hand sewing for the present," and she entered the little house with

quite a different air from that of the plum thicket.

Certainly the Indian agent, at his first interview some weeks earlier, had not to complain of any lack of dignity in the young field matron.

"You understand that suitable quarters will be provided for you, Miss — ah! — Miss Waring," he had drawled, keeping his heavy-lidded eyes upon her face with a persistency that was not altogether pleasant.

("First Indian girl I ever Miss'd," he acknowledged later to his grinning cronies in the office, "and it came sort of hard. Nothing else for it, though. She's considerable of a lady, *she* is!"

"Considerable to look at, too, I sh'd say," Jack Pepper mumbled under his breath.)

"I expect to stay with my friend, Young Eagle's wife, in her house on

Cherry Creek," Stella had replied, simply. " Her grandmother will live with us."

" Hum-ha . . . Miss — ah! — Waring, if you have quite made up your mind to that, we shall have to make some improvements on the house. It's an ordinary log cabin, isn't it, Mr. Pepper? . . . one room? . . . Two? That's good. Well, I'll tell you what we'll do. We will build a frame addition 16 by 20 feet, for the field matron's private apartment, with three windows and a good floor; lay floors in the other two rooms and put on a good, shingled roof. With these additions, I think you ought to be fairly comfortable."

" Thank you, Major; that will be quite satisfactory," Stella had answered, calmly.

" And about the furniture " (still keeping a furtive eye upon her face) — "Mr. Pepper, will you take this — ah! —

this young lady to the warehouse and help her make out a list of her needs in that line? We supply only the necessaries, of course: iron beds with mattress and blankets, tables, kitchen chairs, stoves, dishes and so forth. If there is anything more that I can do for you, Miss Waring, I shall be happy to see you at any time."

Possibly the "Little Father" would not have been quite so bland and accommodating if he had not had in his desk at that moment a letter from Washington, containing very plain instructions as to the conveniences to be supplied and the official courtesies to be extended to the newly appointed field matron, Miss Stella Waring. The good Doctor's precautions were already justified.

The first meeting of the Cherry Creek sewing circle was a decided success — that is to say, the first ever held there

under the civilizing auspices of a paternal Government, since from time immemorial the Sioux women have been accustomed to get together in the fashion common to all other women under the sun. For nobody knows how many hundreds of years they have plied their feminine implements — such as awl of bone and sinew of deer — and with dyed quills of the porcupine and hand-wrought or trader-bought beads, with skins tanned to a velvety softness or costly broadcloth of red and blue, have made and decorated their native finery with no mean skill, the while their tongues were busy with soft syllables of domestic chat and village gossip, after the universal feminine pattern.

The time was now ripe, it seemed, for some advance along these time-honored lines. Indeed, this small settlement on Cherry Creek is still among the most

primitive on the whole Sioux reservation, having no day-school or settled mission of its own, and several of the women had expressed a wish to learn of their sophisticated sister the complicated art of the white woman's dress-making.

So here they were, gathered under the picturesque brush arbor to the number of a score or more, the younger attired as gayly as tropical birds, the elder in sober plumage of dingy browns and grays, all with demurely drooping plaits of hair and shoulders modestly draped in the invariable shawl. Most were primly seated on common wooden chairs, while a few of the older and more conservative preferred a blanket on the hard-trodden earth floor.

Stella had a table full of work cut out and basted; puritanical checked gingham dresses and wide print aprons, together with boxes of thimbles and needles and

thread; and the lesson proceeded, at first with some constraint, but soon with a loosening of tongues and a torrent of soft laughter and musical dialect.

Of course, all who had babies had brought them on their patient backs, and several youngsters of Chaskay's age or younger were tumbling about the floor or running races over the sunshiny prairie. There were almost as many dogs as children, and a certain Miss Day, who had neither, appeared with the pretty, striped face of her pet 'coon peeping coquettishly over one shoulder.

Presently refreshments were served in orderly fashion by the two young hostesses — tea, boiled rice flavored with meat, the plums gathered the day before, and a quantity of small, flaky biscuit baked that morning by Yellow Star.

"I should like to make biscuit like those," Miss Day remarked, after an

astonishing number had been consumed.

"Can you teach me to make the spongy bread of the white people?" asked another.

"My husband has often asked for the apple-pie he had at school," chimed in a little bride.

"We will have a cooking-class," laughed the young field matron, "and learn to make all these and many more. You must all keep chickens and milk a cow or two; then we can have ever so many good things — things fit to build strong bodies for your children."

"If only the Little Father would not take them all away from us, as soon as they can walk, almost, to fill his school!" mourned an older woman.

"Did you know that the Little Father had given his permission for a dance tonight?" whispered a flighty girl to Blue

Earth, whose face lighted up quickly at the news. Then she glanced half guiltily at her friend, justly fearing that the Indian dance might be under a ban. The comfortable house and abundance of food, to say nothing of sympathetic companionship, were too good to risk lightly.

"But you went to the white people's dances when you were in the East," she pleaded, after the others had gone, and the slow, teasing throbs of the dance-drum resounded through the village.

"That's quite different," Yellow Star explained. "We want our people to forget these exciting customs, and care for better things," she reasoned, gently.

"But I'm not going to dance; I only want to look on a little while," begged Blue Earth, as humbly as a child.

"All the white people do that; even the Little Father himself," pronounced Grandmother.

" Then, will you promise to come home as soon as it is dark? "

" Oh, yes! " cried the other, eagerly.

But, like another Cinderella, she forgot, and lingered near an open window of the large, circular dance-house, her baby asleep on her back, gazing fascinated on the gorgeous, barbaric spectacle of painted, half-clad men executing their wonderful steps and poses, till aroused by a touch on her arm and a sweet, reproachful voice in her ear. And this is the true story of how the field matron chanced to be observed by old Standing Cloud and others, in the outer circle of the Grass Dance after dark of a balmy September evening, a fact which came duly to Jack Pepper's ears and made her some little trouble, later on.

CHAPTER XVI

BY RETURN OF POST

LAUREL, APRIL THIRTIETH.

STELLA DARLING: If you only knew how we miss you here in Laurel! It seems like years since you went away; can it be it's only nine months? And you don't write half as often as you promised. I wonder what you are really and truly up to!

"Have you picked out your allotment yet? Be sure and get a good one. Oh, how I wish I were twenty-one this minute! Daddy perfectly understands that the very day I come of age I shall start on the long journey to Dakota, to join my dear friend Stella and stock that cattle ranch.

"Of course, you will want to hear all

the news. Doris has been spending two weeks in Boston with her uncle — the rich one. What do you think? she went to the Symphony Orchestra twice, and to the opera once, and to two — no, three dances! She has the loveliest braided suit in a perfectly exquisite shade of blue; and a set of chinchilla furs for Christmas; and two new party dresses and a pale-blue evening cape lined with salmon that is simply a dream. I can't tell you half. Doris is getting to be a *regular society girl;* and that, you know, Jibby, I never wanted to be and never will.

"Mother bought me a handsome suit, too — mine is the new copper shade — and a stylish hat; and Daddy would have taken me to New York on his last trip, but just then poor old Scotty had to break his leg, and of course I wouldn't stir for *worlds*.

"Oh, I must tell you all about it! Just fancy! Ethan Honey happened to be in town over Easter, stopping with Uncle Si; and you know there isn't any vet in Laurel; and so, I just 'phoned him — I was almost crazy, of course — and asked what *should* I do! He was perfectly splendid; got to the house in less than half an hour, and set the leg so that it's practically as good as new! Wasn't it clever of the dear boy? They say he's thought everything of at the medical school, and bound to make a name for himself, some day.

"Speaking of Uncle Si, he hasn't been quite as well as usual this winter; 'kinder off the hooks,' as he says. Mother Brown is trying to persuade him that he oughtn't to live out there all alone any longer. Uncle Si says 'it's all-fired lonesome since the gals stopped comin'' and if you 'had a hankerin' after mis-

sionary work, he could 'a' showed you where you could put in your best licks, right here at hum.' He means looking after him, of course; did you ever hear of anything so selfish? But old people are always selfish, I think.

"Grandma Brown says that a girl that'd disappint her own pa and hurt his feelin's for the sake of a outlandish hound dog hadn't ought to have a pa. You know she never liked me so very well, anyway. She's always telling Doris how much better you used to do things. Doris says, if she didn't love you dearly, she'd have been sick to death of hearing your name, long before this.

"You asked me in two or three of your letters about Miss Sophia. I don't see why you care so much about Miss Sophia; *she* never did anything for *you* if she could possibly help it. She never liked me, either; I went to see her, entirely for

your sake, dear, about a week ago. Seems to me she's getting kind of old and feeble; and one funny thing, she didn't scold a bit, not even when Scotty would squeeze past me and put his paw right up on her black cashmere lap. I don't see how he ever dared. She asked me twice, when I heard from you last.

" Miss Morrison was in town the other day. She inquired after you the very first thing, of course. Miss Morrison thinks it was very fine and noble in you to go out to Cherry Creek.

" Why do you never say a word about the boys? Aren't there any nice ones at all? Of course, you know how it is here; they're *all* devoted to Doris! The next thing we'll hear will be that she's *engaged!* Jibby, darling, I'm just as sure as ever that I shall never, *never* want to get married. You *will* wait for me, won't you? Wait till I'm twenty-one, I mean, and

we can live together all the rest of our lives.

"Your own

"CYNTHIA.

"P. S. By the way, Ethan has grown ever so much handsomer since you saw him last. He looks years older and — and — oh, you know what I mean!

"C. P.

"N. B. Jibby, the minute you get this letter I want you to sit right down and tell me just what you are doing, and answer every single question, or I'll never forgive you.

"SIN."

"CHERRY CREEK, MAY THE EIGHTH.

"MY DEAREST CYNTHIA: About half an hour ago, a girl you used to know was looking out of the window of her little prairie home. Such a funny little home, just one big room all shining yellow pine,

with skins and rag rugs on the bare pine floor, a closet curtained off with dark blue calico, a black iron bed and a wash-stand and a trunk and some book-shelves built out of packing-boxes. Oh, and a lot of Indian bead-work on the walls, and a pine table covered with a Navaho blanket, and on it some old school-books and papers and pens and ink; and right over it a class picture in a frame — the class of 19— at Laurel academy!

" The girl, as I said before, was looking out of the window; just watching the green creep over the prairie like an emerald fire kindled by the sun, and following the white road with her eyes as far as she could — the road that leads to the agency and the railroad and civilization.

" While she looked, a black speck appeared away out on that road. The speck grew bigger; soon it turned into a

lumber wagon drawn by two shaggy ponies and driven by a tall, dark man in the navy-blue uniform of the Indian Police, with a shining shield on his breast that flashed in the sun.

"In a few minutes she heard the rattle of wheels, and then the camp dogs ran out to meet the good policeman with welcoming barks, and the girl left her window and went to the door that opened on the green prairie. For there are two doors in the yellow pine house; the other one leads right into a log kitchen where a tin coffee pot stood on the stove and an old woman squatted close by, tending a dear little baby, while the baby's mother, in a red dress made like a kimono, was piecing a calico quilt.

"Well, the policeman pulled up his rough little ponies right in front of the door, threw down the lines and began handing out beef and flour and other

things, which the woman in the red kimono carried into the house. Then, last of all, he put his hand in his breast pocket, took out two letters and gave them to the girl. After that, he saluted and drove away again.

"The girl sat down on the high door-sill and read her letters; one made her laugh out loud, to the great surprise of a very small dog who had curled up on a corner of her skirt. The letter was from her friend — her dearest, far-away friend in the New England hills. And now she is going to sit down at her table with the gay blanket cover, facing the class picture, and write her answer.

"I hope this doesn't sound homesick, Cynthia and Doris — for this letter is to Doris, too — but you know how it is in the spring; how the people and the things that are far away seem to pull at your heart. If I were back there in Laurel,

I should be dreaming of Dakota; and it *is* wonderful out here, girls! I wish you could see the great, furry anemones and the colt's-foot and verbenas and all the other purple and gold-colored things that follow each other in a mad scamper over the wavy bluffs. And it seems as if I had never drawn a real, deep breath anywhere but here. It's like the ocean wind without the salt in it.

"And I'm very fond of the people, though they *are* provoking, sometimes. They forget so — just like children. And Sir Walter mustn't be jealous, but you ought to know my Sheka — that means 'Poor Little Thing.' He never leaves me if he can help it, and he's just exactly like a real person.

"I don't think I ever told you about the time we had getting our Chaskay into school. All the children have to go now as soon as they are five, and the mothers

put off that fifth birthday just as long as they can; but Chaskay was five last summer, and in the fall the policeman came for him to go to the boarding-school. Well, it was dreadful! Blue Earth wailed, and Grandmother sang the old Indian songs and shook her fist in the policeman's face, and the poor little fellow was scared out of his wits and screamed till I was frightened, myself.

"Then I had an idea, and I said: 'Why not take him every day to the day school in Ring Thunder's camp? He's too little to leave his mother at night; why, he can't even dress himself yet.'

"So it was settled, and we two take turns carrying him on horseback, five miles each way, morning and evening. Blue Earth rides her spotted pony, 'Baby,' and I my iron-gray pacer, 'Old Soup,' the people call him, because he

goes from side to side, just like stirring something in a pot.

"It was glorious fun while the fine weather lasted. I don't mind coyotes a bit, and I got used to the rattlesnakes after a while, remembering Ethan's; but a five-mile ride in a Dakota blizzard isn't any fun, especially with a child on the saddle in front of you, and you with your hands full to keep him from freezing. It's better to just let the horse take his own course, anyway, when you can't see the road a bit.

"But the worst was this spring, when the ice broke up on the White river. You see, the schoolhouse is on the other side of the river, and it was easy fording it in the fall, when the water is low, and easier still crossing on the ice; but one windy March day the ice broke up while we were on the further side.

"Good 'Old Soup!' He just gathered

up his four feet into a bunch and jumped from cake to cake, floating and swirling around there in the black water, and once or twice he missed his footing and went in deep enough to wet my toes in the stirrups. I can tell you, girls, I was glad enough when he scrambled out on the other side. And wasn't the boy brave? He never uttered a sound!

"There have been a great many sick people this spring — mostly with coughs and consumption. I take them beef-tea and milk gruel and rice and things, and it's best to stay and see them eat it if you want to be sure. Especially if they're women; they would so much rather give it to the men.

"One morning I was wakened out of a sound sleep by a tap on the window-pane. The sun was shining brightly, but I looked at my dear little watch that always hangs at the head of my bed, and it was

only five o'clock. What do you suppose the woman said? — for it was a poor, old woman. 'My son is dying, and begs for some light biscuit right away!'

"So I got up and built the kitchen fire before even Grandmother was stirring, and the poor sick man had his last wish, I guess, for he really did die. He was a young man who had been away to school.

"There are several returned students here who are thankful to come and look at my magazines and my photographs, and sing hymns, and get me to explain things to them. If I knew a little more, I would try to have an evening class. They always treat me with respect and call me 'Older Sister.' Why, the other day one of them even asked my advice about getting married! What do you say to that?

"There are two or three I don't like at all — half-breeds and white men.

One is an 'assistant farmer;' they are the men who are supposed to teach the Indians farming, but sometimes I think they don't do much but run errands for the agent. This one's name is Jack Pepper, and he visits this camp rather often. I don't like his looks a bit, and I try to be out of the way when he comes.

"I make a great many calls, for I find the women like to have me come, and besides, it keeps them up to the mark in their housekeeping. Often the first thing I see, long before I get to the house, is a cloud of dust coming out of the front door. Then I know that some one has spied me coming, and is putting the one room in company trim. By the time I get there, it has not only been swept, but the beds neatly made, with fresh white pillow-cases, the dishes washed, the cupboard put in order, and perhaps, if I don't hurry, the youngest child has its

face scrubbed and a clean dress slipped on over the old one.

"Give my love to all — especially darling Doris and all her family. I often think of Grandma Brown. You'll think it funny, I suppose, but Grandmother here reminds me of her a good deal. Not her looks, of course, for she isn't neat and nice a bit; her fingers are like claws and her hair like gray feathers, almost; but they both have a way of speaking right out and saying things that bite.

"I shake hands with you in my heart, as our people say. "STELLA.

"P. S. If you happen to see Doctor Ethan again, please give him my kind regards."

CHAPTER XVII

"PRAY FOR MY PEOPLE WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN!"

OF course, Stella couldn't put everything into a letter, and one of the things she didn't mention was a regular proposal of marriage from the old chief, Standing Cloud. She called him "old," but he was really a rather fine-looking man of something over fifty. He had "thrown away" one wife in obedience to the law of the white man, and had then lost the other soon afterward, and he had missed no detail of the appearance of the young school girl on that fateful evening when she had gone after Blue Earth to the dance house. For the minute that she had stood there, framed in the open window, the light of

the fire had struck full upon her winsome face and tall, supple figure, bringing out every line and feature with almost startling distinctness.

Standing Cloud was not a particularly progressive chief, but he knew a pretty girl when he saw her. This was a girl of his own people, after all, and an orphan at that; everybody knew her history, and such a man as he was not to be daunted by a few years of schooling. She had sense enough, probably, to appreciate the honor he intended to do her.

His offer came in round-about fashion, first through the grandmother, as was fitting, and finally through Blue Earth, who, with many giggles and much tossing of the head, managed at last to convey some inkling of it to the astonished and indignant girl.

"That old man!" she exclaimed, in disgust. "I don't see how you can have

the face to repeat such a thing. Why, how many wives has he had? "

"Only two; and he hasn't *any* now; and he's a *chief*, you know."

"That's quite enough. I don't wish to hear another word about him as long as I live! "

And Grandmother was left to smooth over the affair as best she might, inventing all manner of humble excuses to cover the unheard-of rejection of a man of such importance.

Then there was Moses Blackstone, a serious young man who had passed some years in the mission boarding-school as its prize scholar, and was now a lay reader in the village, and a regular caller at the field matron's home. In default of an evening school, she innocently encouraged him to sit by the hour at a corner of her table, poring over some old school-book, or stumbling over the long words in the

illustrated magazines that came from her eastern friends. Occasionally he would even write letters on her stationery and frankly "borrow" her stamps; but Moses was really such a good young man, and so earnest and humble, that she lent him a helping hand whenever she could, with scarcely more self-consciousness than if he had been Chaskay's age.

If he took unusual pains with his dress of late, the fact had escaped her, as also that he was not at all a bad speaker in his native Dakota. His English was inadequate, and she always made him talk to her in English, thus cruelly putting him at a disadvantage.

Therefore Stella was honestly shocked when one day Grandmother slyly pressed into her hand a little folded note, and upon carelessly opening it, she found a regular love-letter, signed "Moses."

To tell the truth, it was very prettily and poetically expressed. "I am thinking of something," it began in the native tongue. "I think of it night and day. It will not let me rest nor sleep. It is always of you that I think and of my longing to be near you, and my wish that we two might be one."

Stella was really most unreasonable. Her cheeks glowed and her black eyes snapped. She tore the pleading little note into tiny bits, and strewed it on the floor before Grandmother's astonished old eyes. That was her answer.

The missionary from the east who had stepped into Father Waring's old shoes was far from finding them a fit. Though he had been there for several years, people still called him "the new minister," a circumstance which tells its own story to the discerning. Certainly his

manner was a trifle dry, even when his intentions were most kind.

It seemed to our heroine, who we know was sensitive to a fault, that everybody looked at her critically, even coldly, when she came to the agency church in her trim, tailor-made suit and tasteful little hat, and modestly took her seat among the shawled and hatless Indian women, or when, innocently conspicuous, she walked the one street on "Issue Day," with business-like intentness upon her various errands.

She was fairly happy, upon the whole, among her own people at Cherry Creek, but with the "white people," who should have welcomed her in all sincerity as a fellow-worker, she felt lonely and ill at ease. It was just as if the agent and his employees, the minister, and most of all their wives, were continually saying among themselves:

" How long do you suppose she'll keep it up? Too well-dressed and too self-possessed for an Indian girl, anyway; looks as if she thought too much of herself — needs taking down a peg."

This note of patronage and suspicion was so unlike the general attitude toward her in her New England home that Stella couldn't help resenting it, and accordingly held her well-groomed head a trifle higher than before. There was only the little day-school teacher in Ring Thunder's camp, Chaskay's teacher — a simple, good-hearted girl, not much older or more experienced than Yellow Star herself — these two got on together from the first. Stella fell into the habit of going over there on " Old Soup " to spend her Sundays, since she had actually come to dread meeting any of the agency people, and after poor Moses' unwelcome pretensions she no longer cared to attend

the rather primitive but always reverent little service in his large log cabin.

Long before September came round again, Stella had learned that the annual church convocation would meet at "our agency" this year. This meant a great gathering of perhaps a thousand Indians who came from agencies hundreds of miles distant, traveling overland, for the most part, in picturesque canvas-topped wagons loaded with camp equipage, toward the appointed meeting-place. It was the event of the year to all good Christian Indians, bringing social as well as spiritual inspiration, comfort, and cheer.

Most of all, Stella looked forward to meeting the Bishop, whose face of lofty calm and sweetness, under its silvery crown of hair, floated high like a white cloud among dear memories of childhood days. In those days, he had been from

time to time a guest under their roof, giving to the very food he shared a sacramental savor, and as a small, shrinking, black-eyed maid she had never lost the sense of a grave and gentle Presence in the little white guest-chamber they called the " Bishop's Room."

And now the simple, loving preparations were all complete. Not without self-sacrifice, a feast had been provided for the visitors, forage for the visitors' horses, fresh vestments for the clergy, and candles for the plain little altar. Near the little Gothic church at the agency rose a wide circle of teepees, looking as if a flight of great, white birds had suddenly alighted upon the sunburned grass. Children ran joyously to and fro, men gathered in groups, matronly women bent over their camp-fires, and the soft music of their greetings was in the air.

Before the church bell should ring to

summon the dark-skinned congregation to their first service under the open sky, the Bishop sat at meat in the modest rectory, reaping the year's harvest of rewards and perplexities, and now and then dropping a quiet seed of counsel, or straightening a tangled skein of anxiety.

"And where is my little Stella?" he asked presently, with a smile. "I understand that she has come back to Cherry Creek as a field matron."

"I have heard no complaints of her work, Bishop," the missionary acknowledged, frowning slightly nevertheless. "I — a — I believe she is quite efficient; however, we do not see her at church as often as I could wish. Certainly I expected her to-day, but we have seen nothing of her."

"The truth is," his wife added, rather sharply, "it isn't easy to get into touch

with Stella Waring. She — well — she's almost too much the lady for Cherry Creek. Too well-dressed, even; I fancy people think she puts on airs. That good Moses Blackstone was quite seriously interested at one time; I really think Stella treated him badly. Don't you think, Bishop, it's apt to spoil them a little — this going east for an education?"

"Spoil them? Why, yes, my dear lady; for hewers of wood and drawers of water no doubt it may spoil them. We must not expect them to slip back into quite the old place," suggested the Bishop, mildly. "It may even be possible that she has outgrown our good Moses. Stella was always a dear child; let me see — it's just six years since I confirmed her. I should like very much to see her again."

The missionary parlor had quickly filled, meantime, with the Bishop's friends and disciples of both races, among them

Stella herself, her lithe, girlish figure half hidden behind a window curtain, her soft eyes fastened eagerly upon the closed door. At last a quick, decided step was heard, and the gracious form of the Bishop, as erect as of old but looking to the girl much frailer and older than she had remembered him, entered the crowded room. His keen, kind eyes, darting rapidly from one face to another, flashed instant recognition into her own, and almost before she knew it, Stella found herself standing before him, all a-tremble with timid happiness, and both slim, brown hands drawn into the Bishop's strong clasp.

"Can this tall girl be my little Stella?" she heard him say, while over a face in repose a little sad and stern there broke that smile like winter sunshine — a spirit radiance that none who saw it can ever forget. The rest fell back instinctively,

or else the Bishop drew her into a quiet corner, and for a minute they two were alone together.

"I hope I may hear that you are happy in your work for our poor people?" began the Bishop, very gently.

The quick tears shone in Stella's expressive eyes.

"I'm sorry for them — I love them," she murmured; "but oh, Bishop! I do so miss dear Mother and Father Waring!"

"I miss them, too," the Bishop responded, with such delicate sympathy in his tones that she found the courage to go on.

"I miss my — my friends in Laurel, too, Bishop! I — I'm afraid I don't know enough for the work either; and yet I do truly want to help."

"Of course you do, my child," responded the Bishop. "Why, the very

name we gave you in baptism signifies a star — a light unto the Gentiles — a candle that shall be set upon a candlestick to give light to all that are in the house. That is what we have always expected of you. And even the name the old women gave you when they saved you from the sad fate that overtook your father's people — The-One-who-was-left-Alive! You must have been kept alive for some good purpose; always remember that, Stella. Have you ever thought that you might like to go back to the East for more training — perhaps for the training of a nurse?" he went on, the keen eyes searching her grave, downcast face.

Stella blushed more and more as it flashed upon her for the first time that the Bishop knew a good deal about the last six years of her life — had doubtless been in correspondence with Laurel friends.

"I — I think I would, Bishop; only not just yet. You see, I promised Blue Earth. And besides," she went on, with desperate honesty, "the white people here seem to think I know too much already. They seem not to like me because I — I suppose I am different from the other Indian girls."

A sudden sternness drove the smile from the Bishop's face, and for a moment or two he was quite silent, while the sweet-toned bell in the church tower began its call to sunset prayer.

"We will talk of this again," he said, very gently. "God bless you, my dear child!" And he was gone.

With blurred eyes and dizzy brain Stella blindly followed the throng of gayly dressed, yet most quiet and reverent worshipers, young men and maidens, old men and children, mothers with babes in arms, and took her place in the great

circle upon the bare prairie sod. In the center of the ring the Bishop and his ministers, many of whom showed earnest dark faces above the snowy surplices, read the prayers of the church and gave utterance to the Christian hymns that rose in a great wave of devotion to the skies. The soft syllables of her native Dakota tongue seemed to fit the dear, familiar words, and no one who looked upon that scene could ever have guessed that only eighteen years before those tawny hills had been black with armed men, and that peaceful plain strewed with the tortured forms of the dead and dying.

That needless, unpremeditated, pitiful slaughter of helpless children and women, so recklessly thrust in the way of the all-conquering white man! Stella tried not to dwell upon it; but whenever she was deeply moved the prostrate figure of the nameless mother would appear

before her eyes — an ample womanly form shrouded in a dark blanket, and always with the face hidden.

To-night the crowd and the music and the beauty of the sunset and the Bishop's words together had so wrought upon her, that the mother who sheltered her from the bullets seemed very near, and, forgetting pride and resentment and a certain secret longing, Stella gave herself up wholly to the deep magic of the hour. In her soul there reverberated that phrase Father Waring had once repeated to them, as coming from the lips of one of his native helpers:

"Pray for my people when the sun goes down!"

CHAPTER XVIII

FACING THE SUNRISE

"I DON'T see how they can *breathe*, do you?" Stella prettily apologized to the agency doctor, her bright face a pleasant enough sight in his musty old office, its shelves filled with unwholesome drugs reaching from floor to ceiling. Still a "fresh-air" enthusiast, as in the old Laurel days, she had insisted upon holding long consultations with this official, until he had simply been obliged to rouse himself and forsake the old routine of doling out these same drugs to a long line of Indians, — so far, at least, as Cherry Creek was concerned. Curious, how that young woman would take a personal interest in every single case.

Accordingly, he had entrusted to her

a shelf of simple remedies, and had fallen into the habit of sending her full written directions for the care of patients in her neighborhood, especially the children. After she had brought the village almost single-handed through an epidemic of measles, with not a single fatality, he did not withhold from her the praise she certainly deserved, for measles had been regarded as generally fatal among the camp children.

Not satisfied with her accomplishments as a nurse, the young field matron had ideas of her own, which, as confidence grew, she imparted to her ally the doctor, and through him they gradually sifted into the office, and sometimes even appeared on official estimates and requisitions. It was, in fact, at her suggestion that the assistant farmers throughout the reservation had been instructed to teach milking and feeding calves by hand, so

that there might be milk for young children and motherless babies. An improved brand of vegetable seeds supplied in greater variety had likewise produced good results. Perhaps her best idea was that of building mud and stone chimneys on to the unventilated log cabins — a plan that might have saved many lives if there had been energy enough available to put it into effect. To be sure, there were plenty of tents for tuberculous patients, but to suggest moving from a house into a teepee would have been far too reactionary.

Within eighteen months, she had become quite the autocrat of her own little village — old Standing Cloud being merely the figure-head. She had drilled her small household with infinite patience — and not without a long siege with Grandmother — to such "civilized" habits as regular meal-times, sitting down

at table, and a weekly wash-day. The children's bath night was duly observed, even though the ceremony must take place in a wooden wash-tub beside the kitchen stove.

After all this, it really was hard that when their own darling baby — Little Girl, they called her — came down with acute bronchitis, Grandmother and even Blue Earth suddenly rebelled, and obstinately refused to have anything to do with the " white man's way." The little stove was kept constantly stuffed with wood, and the baby lay gasping on the bed, rolled in unsavory quilts, reeking with heat and untouched for days by a drop of water. To all Stella's pleas for a warm bath, an open window, even in an adjoining room, she received the sullen reply:

" This is no time for fooling. It didn't matter when Little Girl was well, but

now she is very sick. If we are not careful, she will die!"

It was the dead of winter, but nevertheless Stella rode the fifteen miles to the agency on her faithful pony, saw the doctor, and even persuaded him to ride back with her. Backed by his authority, she took bodily possession of the sick child, gave it an alcohol rub, air, and medicine, and watched through the long, silent night.

Next morning, Little Girl was plainly worse. Grandmother crawled out-of-doors and tied a rag of red calico to a pole — her pitiful, unspoken prayer to the Powers! Her hoarse voice could be heard in the pauses of the wind, chanting a weird and mournful song.

Stella inwardly trembled at the sound, and all the spirits of her ancestors seemed to upbraid her from the dull, resentful eyes of the tormented mother, who sat

huddled on the bed like a crouching animal, staring at the intruder with a look that said plainly:

"You have an Indian skin, but a white heart. If my child dies, *you* will have killed her!"

The girl shut her eyes and her ears, and she, too, prayed.

But she didn't forget when the time came to give the doctor's medicine. Hours passed like a bad dream, until, as she bent over the loved little form, a moment was enough to note the easier breathing, the beads of sweat on the pinched baby face. And that terror had gone by.

It was now late August, and no rain had fallen on the reservation for many weeks. The waving sea of prairie grass, vivid in May as a green gem, was now of a rufous brown. Water-holes were sucked

dry; the smaller creeks had quite forsaken their sandy beds, and many of the people had to drive their cattle and horses long miles to water, every morning and evening.

The "Little Father" sat humped up in his office chair, with his coat off, discontentedly signing a batch of official papers and heaping objurgations on the weather, when Blue-Coat unceremoniously made his way in at the wide-open door and thrust a letter under the agent's nose. The letter was from Cherry Creek.

"There is a large prairie fire to the west of us and the wind is blowing strong in our direction. I am sure the camp is in danger. Only the women and two or three old men are at home. Please send help at once.

Respectfully,

"STELLA WARING."

"Umph!" he grunted, rousing himself a trifle, however. "That all so, Lone Bull? Well, tell Pepper to step here a minute. Hello, Jack! here's a windfall for you. The little field matron out at Cherry Creek wants to be saved from a prairie fire. That's a Number One allotment she's picked out — better get a move on at once. I'm looking for a tenderfoot from the East to-day; team's just gone to the landing after him; may take a drive out that way later on. Good luck to you!"

When Jack Pepper pulled up his steaming span in front of Stella's home, the girl was out with "Old Soup" and a rusty plow, trying, with the help of Blue Earth and one or two others, to drive a furrow around the threatened camp. But it was evident that their unaccustomed hands were making hard work of it. The

advancing line of smoke and flame had drawn perceptibly nearer; a hot blast was blowing directly in their faces, and the red sun swam in an angry haze. The situation looked fairly serious.

"Hey, Stella! so you had to send for me, at last!" was the young man's familiar greeting.

The girl looked past him with unseeing eyes. "I wrote to the *agent*," she replied, shortly.

"Scared out of your wits, I'll bet! Well, if I help you out of this scrape, what am I going to get for it, eh?" he persisted, coming closer.

Stella flashed one glance at the coarse face unpleasantly near her own, then at the winking red line of fire driven straight toward them on the wings of a strong wind. The fire was preferable, so far as she was concerned; but there were Blue Earth and her terrified babies and

poor, helpless old Grandmother! There were many others in the same plight. Doubtless they could escape by hasty flight; but these poor huts held their little all on earth, and must they be abandoned? What was to be done?

"Will you take this plow? or shall I?" she blazed out. "You can see for yourself there's no time to lose."

"Well, of all the high-an'-mighty airs! — and her nothin' more than a squaw, when all's said an' done," muttered the man. "Say, Stella, you wait till the Major hears of your goin's-on; 'tendin' Injun dances late at night and all that sort of thing! I know more about you than you think I do, and maybe you'll be sorry yet you tried to turn me down."

Stella, choking with wrath, caught up the plow-handles again without a word and chirruped to the patient pony. As her eyes mechanically swept the horizon,

though without hope of aid, they descried a rapidly driven team approaching from the direction of the agency. Jack saw her face lighten suddenly, and saw, too, what had done it. In hot haste he jerked a plow from the back of his wagon, hitched his waiting team, and started a furrow both wide and deep a few rods from the cabins, whose owners were running hither and thither in helpless terror.

Half-blinded with smoke, and quivering with outraged pride, Stella dropped her plow to confront the agent and another — a tall, well-knit youth who was hurrying forward with both hands outstretched.

"Ethan — why, Ethan!"

"I seem to be just in time, again, Stella," was all he said, and the plow started with a running jerk as the gray pony felt a man's hand on the bit.

Two hours later, when the danger was over, and the smoking prairie lay black in the path of the setting sun, two young people stood side by side on a bluff overlooking the Indian camp.

"What was that fellow saying to you just before we came up, anyway? I thought I noticed a spark in somebody's eye that was considerably hotter than the prairie fire," Ethan slyly observed.

"He . . . he doesn't know any better, I suppose," Stella murmured.

"Looked to me as though he needed kicking, all right," the young man cheerfully assented, and something in the set of his jaw and the swing of his athletic shoulders hinted that Jack Pepper would do well to avoid his immediate neighborhood.

"Well, never mind him now. He isn't worth it," pursued her old friend. "Don't you want to hear all the news from home?

About the girls — and dear old Uncle Si? And your little 'wild orphan?' You know, I'm an orphan myself, Stella."

"But you're grown up," she returned, not looking at him.

"So has the fawn grown up — and taken to the woods," laughed the young man. "Come, Stella, I've brought you a message. Guess who it's from. No, not Cynthia this time; not even the old Doctor. I've brought you a message from — Miss Sophia!"

He paused to observe the effect of his words, in the soft, black eyes that seemed to widen and deepen gloriously under his steady gaze.

"Yes, Miss Sophia isn't so young as she was — and there's something in her, after all, that's stronger than prejudice and pride. It must have been there always, buried so deep down that nobody ever found it out. She simply can't hold

out any longer, all alone so. She wouldn't write, dear, because she couldn't; she sent me all this long way to find you, and tell you that she wants you to come home. Stella, will you come?"

"Miss Sophia wants me," breathed Yellow Star. It seemed impossible — unbelievable. In these few, short years, many people had wanted her, or seemed to want her; but *Miss Sophia!*

For a full minute neither spoke. In the silence, the magical Dakota sunset blossomed rosy-red above the pair, who stood, as it were, cut off from all human companionship, a burned-out world under their feet, their heads in a paradise of color and ecstasy.

"*And all that's best of dark and bright*
Meets in her aspect and her eyes!"

Ethan hummed the old song under his breath.

"Oh!" the Indian girl burst out at last, with something of the old frank impetuosity. "Do you know, Ethan, I seem to be two people again, just as in those first months in Laurel, when you teased me about having so many names" —(Ethan gently shook his head). "I'm pulled two ways at once; I so want to really belong, and I can't tell where I belong! I know, now, that I can't do for my people what I once thought I could, here on the reservation; and yet, isn't it my place? I wonder what the Bishop would say."

"Well, what *did* he say?" sturdily responded Ethan.

"He did — yes, he *did* tell me once I had better go back for more training — to learn to be a nurse."

"Well, isn't taking care of Miss Sophia pretty good training? I believe that just now, at any rate, you belong with her,"

he answered promptly, with a masculine finality that steadied her swimming thoughts. "A lonely, loveless old woman needs you; you are all she has. Come home, dear; come home!"

"Blue Earth told me yesterday that she's going to be married again — to Moses Blackstone. *She* won't need me any more," half laughed, half sobbed the girl, recalling the dumb pleading that had so irritated her in those eyes of Moses'. She was all woman — our little Stella, and the personal note would not be denied. "It can't be just yet, of course; I must take a month or two to wind up everything; but — yes — I'll come!"

They had turned their backs upon the tiny, primitive village, and were facing the eastern horizon, remote and lovely in the transforming after-glow.

"And you graduate from the medical

college when, Ethan? Isn't it next year? Are you really going to settle down in Laurel? "

"Doctor Brown is anxious to divide his practice, but I haven't given him my answer yet," responded Ethan, his serious eyes upon the soft, averted cheek that had at last begun to burn with a delicate consciousness.

"You see, Stella, the *place* doesn't matter much," he went on, with tender confidence. "Any place holds duties to fill a lifetime; it's the *spirit* that really counts. A doctor's heart ought to be as large as all humanity, don't you think so? I may go east; I may go west. I only know one thing surely . . . I must follow my Star! "

"I allers sort o' mistrusted that Injuns was folks." This was Grandma Brown's comment, when she heard that Stella

had been sent for at last. "Seems like there's a sight of human nater in most all of us, — even in that Sophi' Spellman!"

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